

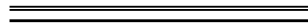
**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Recruiting Today to Protect Tomorrow**



**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Police agencies across the country are experiencing a reduction in the number of applicants for starting positions (Woska, 2006). Police departments are competing with a growing private sector public safety industry, military, and a much larger federal law enforcement workforce (Hart, 2006). As well as competing for less applicants, agencies are needing more officers and many officers are nearing retirement, expanding the problem (Slahor, 2007). This problem will affect all law enforcement agencies.

Law enforcement agencies are going to have to change to insure that they meet the hiring challenges facing them. Law enforcement agencies are going to have to recruit aggressively to meet these challenges. Innovative measures are going to be needed. Police agencies will need to increase women and minority recruitment and focus on recruiting the best qualified applicants, as opposed to finding the largest numbers of applicants (Tangel & Morabito, 2004).

Police agencies use an inherently inefficient hiring process. Police agencies need to evaluate the process and insure they are doing all they can to keep qualified applicants in the process (COPS/IACP, 2009). Having a full time recruitment unit staffed by officers trained to find, identify, and retain the best qualified applicants is critical (Taylor, 2005). Police agencies also need to recognize that the best applicants are not going to look for them, so they need to be proactive and search out the best people to build the best departments (Sharp, 2012).

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## INTRODUCTION

Police departments across the country have to hire the best possible candidates to fill their ranks. Law enforcement agencies have used many different techniques to screen applicants to insure that they are hiring the best possible people to fill their positions (Orrick, 2012), but most do not actively seek applicants (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). The need to attract quality applicants cannot be understated, because without the needed number of officers the agency will not have the resources to complete their mission (COPS/IACP, 2009).

Companies in the private sector have been actively recruiting applicants for years, but police departments have historically not needed to seek out candidates and have been content to wait for applicants to come to them (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Police departments across the county have seen a decline in the number of people applying for police positions over the last several decades. Several reasons have been cited for the decline in applicants, including the fact that potential applicants are joining the military to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan and going to work in private sector jobs, especially in the growing security industry following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Hart, 2006).

As the United States population increases more officers are needed to effectively serve their communities (Haddad, Giglio, Keller & Lim, 2012). The shift in focus from law enforcement to problem solving under community policing means that officers today need to be better qualified to serve their communities than in years past, so departments not only need more applicants, they need better applicants (Slahor, 2007). The increase in minority populations in many communities and their lack of

representation in the departments that provide police service have caused friction with the community, making community policing harder (Whetstone, Reed, & Turner, 2006). The time needed to get an applicant through the hiring process is also a problem. It can take up to a year to get an applicant through the hiring process and as much as two more years to get them through their training (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Departments who are having staffing problems now might have trouble providing basic services to their citizens for years, so there is no time to wait and hope that the current trend reverses itself (Lim, Matthies, & Keller, 2012). Police agencies should aggressively recruit to attract qualified applicants.

## **POSITION**

A survey of police agencies reported that almost 80% of agencies had vacant positions they were unable to fill (Hart, 2006). It is clear that there are fewer applicants at police agencies and that several factors are responsible for the decline (Woska, 2006). Police agencies have to identify what is causing the reduction in applicants. By identifying the causes, agencies can take steps to increase their applicant pool.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in many people who might have been interested in a police career joining the military. Police departments and the military have always attracted the same type of person, people who are interested in public service. The attack had the effect of turning many of these people's attention to service in other countries in order to protect people in the United States. In addition, many police officers who were members of the military reserves or the National Guard were activated to serve in those conflicts. These officers will return to civilian police service, but this creates vacancies while they are away.

The attack also impacted the size of some federal agencies that effect law enforcement. The United States Federal Air Marshal Service was quickly expanded. The exact number of air marshals is not public information, but there are estimates are that there are approximately 4000. There were fewer than 100 prior to the attacks. Many of these Air Marshals were recruited directly from other law enforcement agencies (Whitely, 2012).

Corporations also recognized the need for increased security. In addition, many companies contract to train police forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and there are many former police officers conducting training classes around the country teaching to both law enforcement and the public sector on how to prepare for terrorist attacks. Many of these companies pay better than police positions and offer excellent benefits. Corporations also recognize the need for recruiting and make finding and hiring employees a priority. Many of the people being recruited to these positions are being recruited from police agencies, making vacancies that are hard to fill (COPS/IACP, 2009).

These factors have always existed, but because more people are working in these industries, there has been a greater impact on police applicant numbers. Unfortunately, there is nothing that local police agencies can do about the fact that these industries have grown. Police agencies can work harder to compete with other agencies and private sector companies (COPS/IACP, 2009).

The work environment is also an obstacle to getting quality applicants. Police officers are expected to work odd hours, shift work, and dangerous assignments. Quality applicants can often find jobs in the private sector that pay better and do not

require danger or odd working hours (COPS/IACP, 2009). Although the work of a police officer can be very exciting and dangerous, there are also long stretches where the work is monotonous, which tends to discourage applicants (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Finally, the relationship that the agency has in the community can also have a dramatic impact on applicants. An agency that is not trusted by its community is unlikely to get many applications for employment from the people it serves (COPS/IACP, 2009).

The command structure of police departments can also be an obstacle to quality applicants. Police departments have very few supervisors compared to the number of officers, which limits the chances of promotion. In the private sector, applicants can apply directly for supervisory positions, but in police work, most applicants have to start at the bottom and work their way up (COPS/IACP, 2009).

Researchers found that the hiring process used by police agencies has itself been a burden on the application process. Often recruiting and hiring are handled by divisions outside the police department, such as the city's human resources unit. Since the human resources unit is responsible for hiring for all positions in the city, they do not have the specific knowledge needed to effectively recruit and answer questions of applicants. They are often overburdened by the size of their jobs and cannot provide the needed attention to any specific applicant (COPS/IACP, 2009).

The hiring practice of most agencies is a multistep process designed to disqualify applicants as opposed to a process that is designed to find and hire the best applicants (COPS/IACP, 2009). This process takes too long to be effective (COPS/IACP, 2009), with the process generally getting longer as the agency gets bigger (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Most agencies take little or no time to contact applicants who are in the process,

so applicants searching for a position may go months without hearing from an agency who is attempting to process their applications (Woska, 2006). Many quality applicants have trouble getting to the numerous steps required for police employment due to time restrictions of their current jobs or school hours. Most city human resources units are only open and available during the day on Monday through Friday, even though they are hiring for a position that will likely not be working those hours (Slahor, 2007). Quality applicants know that they can get a job in the private sector quickly and are unwilling to put up with the often frustrating hiring process used by police departments (COPS/IACP, 2009).

Finally, police administrators have to understand that the applicants of today are from a different generation than they come from. The current generation has grown up with technology that results in instant communication and automation of lengthy processes. They are not used to waiting for anything and get easily frustrated by delays. Generation Y also believe that where they work says a lot about who they are and expect a prospective employer to come to them on their terms, as opposed to responding to a help wanted advertisement (Sharp, 2012).

Maintaining needed staffing levels is the most important task that police administration has to perform well. Everything that a police department does depends on the work of people. Not having enough officers will result in agencies not being able to provide those services their communities expect and could result in too few officers to provide even basic services (COPS/IACP, 2009). Police administrators have to take a long term approach to hiring. It takes a lot of time and money to hire and fully train an officer and police departments do not have the ability to hire temporary workers to fill



gaps in staffing (Lim et al., 2012). Failing to look for the best applicants means that police administrators will be betting their agency's future and reputation on the chance that the best applicant will just walk into human resources.

With this in mind, the shortage of applicants will have a long term, dramatic impact on the future of police agencies (Whetstone et al., 2006). Police managers need to look closely at their needs and project not only how many officers will be needed in the future, but how many of their current officers are expected to retire (Orrick, 2012). Estimates are that 37,300 new police positions were created in the United States from 2002-2012. Also, an estimated 30,300 people left law enforcement during the same time. Police managers need to be aware that the baby boomer generation is retiring and there are less potential workers in the following generation (Woska, 2006).

With the number of officers needed rising and the large number of officers reaching retirement age, Police managers have to work harder to retain as many officers as they can. Police managers cannot have much influence on when a person chooses to retire, but they must look closely at officers who are leaving for the private sector or other agencies. Retaining current employees is cheaper and more effective than hiring new officers, so agencies experiencing increased turnover of officers need to look closely for the causes of the turnover. Problems that cause high turnover, such as micromanagement and dissatisfaction with working conditions not only create vacancies as employees leave to go to other work, but make recruiting more difficult (Slahor, 2007).

One of the biggest overlooked source of quality applicants is minorities and women (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Females make up just over 50% of the population

(Orrick, 2012), but only about 12% of law enforcement (Matthies, Keller, & Lim, 2012).

Minorities and women have always been underrepresented in police work.

Researchers have found that in many cases these people are unaware that police work is an option for them or feel that they would not be welcomed into an agency (COPS/IACP, 2009).

Minorities bring many benefits to law enforcement. With agencies switching to a community policing model of law enforcement, it is important that the department reflect the demographics of the community. Failing to match the community results in conflict with the community and results in less effective law enforcement (Haddad et al., 2012). Minority officers also help by bringing understanding of cultural issues and language skills (Matthies et al., 2012). Women officers have several benefits also. Female officers are more likely to have college education, have less complaints, are less likely to violate policies, and use excessive force less than their male counterparts (Orrick, 2012).

The lack of minority employees becomes an obstacle to recruiting quality minority applicants. Many agencies have reported success in using minority applicants to recruit from their own ethnic groups. If an agency does not have any minority officers or has few it creates a situation where there are no positive role models and mentors for new officers joining the force, so they feel they are unwelcome (COPS/IACP, 2009).

Police managers who want to recruit minorities have to target those groups to get them to apply. If this was not needed, they would already have applied (Slahor, 2007). Management must also make diversity in the workplace a core value of the agency and must get all members of the department to work towards diversity. Without a clear

message of the value and need for a diverse workplace, minorities will always feel like outsiders and hiring and retention will be difficult (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Police administrators have to partner with minority groups, minority institutions, and create a presence at community events where minorities are likely to be (Haddad et al., 2012).

## **COUNTER POSITION**

Most police agencies do not actively recruit due to the costs associated with an effective recruiting program. (Jurkanin, Fischer, & Sergevnin, 2001). Few agencies have a full time recruitment unit, and most of these units have very little budget beyond salary (Taylor, 2005). Often, recruitment is conducted by officers who have been injured or for other reasons are not currently able to be used in patrol and are assigned to recruiting as a temporary position until they can return to regular duty (Orrick, 2012). Many agencies do not see a value in investing in recruiting because they have never had trouble filling open positions in the past without resorting to costly recruiting practices (Slahor, 2007). Aggressive recruiting can be an expensive investment. Corporations spend large amounts of money on recruiting, including market research that requires hiring outside companies to identify the best applicants and better advertise an agency (Tangel & Morabito, 2004).

While it is true that corporations have greater recruiting budgets, there are specific actions that police departments can take to reduce recruiting costs (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Additionally, police departments will be held responsible for not hiring enough qualified officers, so liability costs will rise if police managers do not take action to get the best people (Ho, 1999).

The most cost effective way that police managers can conduct recruiting is free. Police administrators should focus on the morale of their agency. Police supervisors who engage in micromanagement, are excessively critical of officers, and fail to provide constructive and positive feedback cause morale to fall. By creating a positive workplace, all employees become recruiters. Officers who are working where there is low morale leave work and complain about their jobs, which does not encourage anyone they talk with to apply. By contrast, employees who are excited about their jobs and speak positively about work are likely to attract others to apply (Orrick, 2012). Offering recruiting bonuses to employees will also insure that all officers are actively recruiting. These bonuses do not have to be expensive, small monetary rewards or extra holidays have been found to be effective to encourage employees (Orrick, 2012).

The internet is a very cost effective way to conduct recruiting and many of the younger applicants in the workforce are well versed in using the internet and use it as their primary source of job information (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Many departments already have a webpage, so it would not cost much to update and modernize it to be a useful recruiting tool. In order to be effective for recruiting, the police department's website should have a clear and prominently placed recruiting button that can take an interested person to a page that shows the number of opening and gives information about the qualifications and responsibilities (Slahor, 2007). Automating the hiring process will allow much of the applicants work to be done wherever he connects to your website. This will make it easier for him to apply and complete paperwork and will also reduce the amount of work being done by current employees processing paperwork (Orrick, 2012). This should not be just a link to the city human resources department,

as much of an applicant's experience as possible should be directly with the department he is interested in (Slahor, 2007).

The internet site should highlight the department's commitment to diversity and should include examples of assignments a potential applicant can strive to work in. In addition, it should have testimonials from officers about the department and the people in it and their commitment to community and service (Orrick, 2012). Creating videos that show the area and what the department has to offer quickly capture attention and demonstrate professionalism (Slahor, 2007). This is called "branding" and should tell the story of the department so people who have always felt they are outsiders can begin to see the department in a different light (COPS/IACP, 2009).

Looking for innovative ways to find applicants can also be a useful and cost effective tool. Each year approximately 200,000 people leave the military and about 45% are under 25 years of age. Sending recruiting posters to military bases can attract the kind of service minded people law enforcement agencies want (Orrick, 2012). Sending a recruiter to a National Guard drill is another way to cheaply find public service minded people. Reserve soldiers need regular jobs and if they know that an agency values their service, they are more likely to apply (Slahor, 2007).

Getting the community involved in recruiting is another way to get more applicants with little cost. Contacting community groups and local churches and getting their involvement helps the agency, but also benefits them. They live and work in the community and have an interest in making sure that the best possible officers provide police services to them (Haddad et al., 2012).

Finally, pooling resources with other agencies can help to reduce costs. Working with several surrounding agencies to find and recruit applicants means that some of the costs of recruiting can be shared. Police departments have historically competed with surrounding agencies, but by pooling resources and working together a better recruiting drive can be done than any one agency could afford on their own.

Some agencies have experimented with lowering standards in order to increase the number of applicants available (Hart, 2006). There is a correlation between the number of available applicants and the difficulty in passing the initial screening. Lowering education requirements, changing drug use restrictions, allowing for poor credit and allowing minor arrests have all been used to increase the number of applicants (Wilson, Dalton, Scheer, & Grammich, 2010). The greater the competition for applicants, the more attractive it becomes to lower standards in order to attract a large applicant pool (Taylor, 2005).

When lowering standards the focus shifts from how to hire the best to how to hire the most (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Agencies need to remain focused on people as a resource. Most of a department's budget goes to paying the salaries of its employees. Since these are the most expensive resource, they need to be the best. Departments cannot provide excellent service to their citizens without excellent employees (Orrick, 2012). As discussed earlier, departments are responsible for the conduct of their officers and lawsuits caused by hiring substandard or unqualified employees can be costly (Ho, 1999).

Police work is more complicated today than it has ever been before. With community policing focusing on problem solving and service instead of merely enforcing

laws, officers today need more training, more education, and higher qualifications (Hart, 2006). The goal of any recruiting program should not be to find people, but to find the right people who will work hard and represent their agency in the best possible way. Having great employees who perform great work will attract other great employees and have a positive effect on the community (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Recruiting has to become a priority for law enforcement agencies. Agencies who do not recruit aggressively will have a hard time filling their open positions. There are fewer people interested in law enforcement and without active recruitment, departments will struggle for years to catch up as more officers are needed and more and more officers retire or leave law enforcement for public sector jobs (Whetstone et al., 2006). Recruiting efforts should be broad based, but should also actively target minorities and women, who are an under used resource for all agencies (Tangel & Morabito, 2004).

Police Administrators who are concerned with the costs associated with recruiting are risking the future of their departments on the hope that the best applicants will show up and apply (Ho, 1999). While recruiting does take time and money, there are many things that administrators can do to improve recruiting without much, or in some cases any, cost (Tangel & Morabito, 2004). Some agencies are attempting to fill needed positions by reducing standards. While this will have the effect of increasing applications, it will result in the wrong employees being hired (Hart, 2006). Today's officers need to be better qualified, not less and lawsuits resulting from negligent hiring and retention can cause incredible damage to an agency and their reputation, making it even harder to get quality applicants (Orrick, 2012).

Excellent service can only be supplied by excellent employees. This is something that is understood in the private sector, but something that law enforcement has to accept (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Police departments have to begin now by making recruiting a priority in their agencies. Reducing problems in the workplace and increasing employee morale will insure that all of their officers are recruiters. Recognizing and then demonstrating that employees are an organization's greatest resource has to begin before an agency has staffing levels fall to a point where service delivery is affected (Orrick, 2012).



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