

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

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**Police Recruitment  
in  
Today's Environment**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The author's research topic, recruitment in today's environment, is relevant to contemporary law enforcement due the emergence of Generation Y as the majority employee demographic, as well as a declining applicant pool. The purpose of the research is to identify both traditional and progressive methods of recruitment, the motivations of the current generation of police candidates and to determine whether or not police agencies in Texas have adapted their recruitment programs to address the current and future issues regarding recruitment. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, texts, and journals. In addition, a survey was distributed to numerous police departments across Texas.

The author discovered that Texas police agencies, in general, are in fact experiencing declining applicant pools, but have not yet adopted progressive methods of recruitment. Through the research, the author discovered that the current generational work force is unusually visual and technologically advanced. Law enforcement however, has not remodeled its recruitment approach to encapsulate these variables attributed to this generation. Specifically, the author discovered a significant weakness in police agencies internet based recruiting, centered on a lack of a website designed with recruitment as a major objective. In addition, the author discovered an overall lack of utilization of other forms of visual media to include television, billboards or mobile advertisements. Several other methods and factors related to recruitment were examined, which confirmed overall that law enforcement agencies in Texas are in need of modernizing their recruitment programs.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the past several years, there has been a steady decline in police department recruit applicant pools. This decline has not been limited to any particular state or geographic area of the United States. As a result of this continuing decline, police departments compete not only with the private business sector, but also with each other, to maintain a continual influx of qualified candidates. Absent a wide variation in wages and other structured benefits, the reasoning that a candidate applies to pursue one agency over another could encompass a variety of explanations. Geographic location, economic infrastructure, familial ties, climate, department presentation, recruitment efforts, ease of application process, all may play a role in a candidate's decision, however police agencies have control over a select few of these factors. This research will focus on recruitment efforts and agency presentation as the means to attract police applicants.

The author will examine the motivations of the current generation of the labor force, commonly known as Generation Y, as well as the traditional methods of police recruitment. In addition, the author will determine whether or not the corporate world is utilizing different recruitment methods than that of law enforcement and will seek out innovative recruitment methods that can be utilized by law enforcement to attract viable candidates. The author will utilize several methods of inquiry to establish a foundation of information related to the topic. Inclusive of this research will be periodicals, journals, studies, texts and reports. In addition, a questionnaire survey will be administered to numerous, varied sized law enforcement agencies within Texas; to determine what recruitment methods are currently being utilized.

It is anticipated that as a result of the available research and the generated questionnaire, the author will discover that most agencies in Texas, regardless of size, incorporate similar recruitment methods that have been time tested, but are not considered innovative or designed to attract today's candidate. The author further expects to find that the current generation of potential applicants is not simply motivated by salary, but is extremely concerned with the work environment, seeking the opportunity for a dynamic and varied career, and is adverse to ridged controls, which exemplifies the culture of most police agencies. Finally, the author expects to extrapolate various innovative recruitment methods and departmental presentation opportunities, through which law enforcement agencies can better compete for the applicants of today and prepare for organizational shifts to accommodate future police officers.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The author reviewed literature pertaining to this issue from several perspectives. What are the traditional methods of police recruiting, how have agencies modernized their recruiting efforts, what motivates the current generation of potential applicants and how law enforcement either has or failed to adapt to this new influx of candidates with respect to recruitment. Traditional police recruitment methods have included presentations at job fairs, static publications at regional police academies, presentations at colleges and military bases, and newspaper ads. Current trends in police recruiting also incorporate radio ads, departmental internet sites devoted to recruitment, various other print media and billboard advertisement (Ellis, Marshall, Skinner, & Smith, 2005).

While all of the aforementioned efforts have experienced varied degrees of success in the past, the current trending in police recruitment remains in decline, due to competition with the private sector or corporate world, other police agencies and the military for the same pool of applicants. The private sector is not constrained by government hiring practices, namely civil service rules, nor is generally accountable to tax payers for budgetary funds. As such, the corporate world has been able to attract candidates utilizing innovative recruiting techniques such as flexible scheduling, telecommuting options, performance bonuses, job sharing, in-house day care and apprenticeships (Armour, 2005; Wheeler, 2000).

However, even with the flexibility afforded the corporate world with regard to recruitment, this industry also struggles to fill positions with qualified candidates, and has recognized that better and varied recruitment techniques is the key to continued growth. Towards this end, experts in the field have recommended that corporations recruit in the locations where the type of people they are seeking are concentrated. Also recommended is sponsorship of events these potential employees attend, brand recognition i.e.: marketing of the company, re-recruitment of quality ex-employees and expansion of the recruiting effort to include those persons who may not possess all of the necessary skills for the job, but nevertheless have the developmental potential. (Wheeler, 2000). While the nature of policing, governmental constraints and traditional models of police related employment may not lend themselves to some of the ideas mentioned above, law enforcement agencies should look to the corporate world as an emulation of what today's workforce is looking for with respect to attraction to a specific career.

The potential employee of today is known as a millennial, or collectively as Generation Y. To garner any successful recruitment strategies towards this group, it is necessary to understand what motivates them with regard to employment. Generation Y is broadly grouped as those who were born between 1977 and 2002, representing over 70 million Americans (Armour, 2005). It is acknowledged that several researchers have differing birth year spans attributed to this generation, however due to the minimal differentiation; the author does not believe the variances to be consequential as they pertain to this topic. This generation has been raised in an inclusiveness atmosphere with overall emphasis on development of their self-esteem and democratic ideals. Many members of Generation Y do not respond well to authority, but rather, expect to be an equal and have a vote as to a course of action. This generation grew up questioning their parents and calling their parents friends by their first names. They are motivated by personal development and self-direction, and don't hesitate to change jobs if they feel stagnant, unstimulated or unappreciated (Moses, 2005).

The concept of company loyalty does not generally appeal to this group, due to growing up during the era of the technology bust and seeing thousands of employees being laid off. This group thrives on challenge, is technologically advanced and wants regular, specific feedback concerning their performance. As it relates to recruitment of this group, communication of personal challenge and personal enrichment is vital. In addition, the observable ability to make a significant contribution from day one and independent responsibility with demonstrative lack of supervisory micromanagement is what will get them in the door.

Several issues need to be reflected upon in order to properly target and attract this new generation of potential employees. First of all, the traditional conception of the public that law enforcement is a blue-collar job must be eliminated. Today's policing requires officers who possess a wide variety of technological and communication skills. Television and other entertainment media primarily portray policing in an unrealistic fashion, more cops and robbers and confrontations, rather than community service and human relations, which is at the core of police work (Ellis, et al., 2005). In addition, the applicant and recruitment process itself is often lengthy, cumbersome, lacks flexibility and is created to weed applicants out. A preferred alternative would be a process designed to identify persons with the desired attributes, evaluate their potential performance and reduce processing delays so that a potential recruit does not accept employment elsewhere while waiting for a job offer. A moniker for this process "Hire for attitude, train for skill" was coined by Southwest Airlines (Freiberg & Freiberg 1998, p. 66), and adopted by Chief Larry Zacharias of the Richardson Texas Police Department, upon his agency's philosophical deviation from the standard hurdle approach to applicants. The result being a streamlined process and oral board overhaul, which focused on the applicant's potential, and less so on the applicant's specific history, as the primary determining factor in hiring. The Los Angeles Police Department has also recognized that candidate processing delays hamper their recruitment efforts, and have instituted a program which slashes the average year wait per candidate to 120 days (Bratton & Webb, 2003).

In so much as the application process relates to and is a part of the overall recruitment experience, it is critical to rethink the traditional model of hurdles and hoops



the applicant must negotiate in order not to get eliminated as a prospective employee. The United States Department of Justice has produced a study of this phenomenon, denoting that the selecting out of candidates through the use of sequential steps to identify what is wrong with the candidate is antiquated and ill advised in consideration of today's workforce and the public's expectation of community service. This study recommends adoption of a process driven by selecting in candidates, by means of identifying what is right about them versus what is wrong, what motivates them to become police officers and marketing the organization to demonstrate the service and human aspect of police work, rather than the aggressive, confrontational aspect, which although occurs, is infrequent in comparison. In addition, this study recommends incorporating civic, religious and business leaders of the community as ambassadors of the police department to assist in the recruitment effort, which widens the potential audience the agency will be able to reach. The study asserts that by adoption of this model, an agency can reach a far greater applicant pool, that would not ordinarily respond to traditional adventure, aggressive stereotyping of police work and would be better suited for the community service role expected of today's police officers by the public (Scrivner, 2006).

Several bodies of work have been devoted to the issue of how can police attract more candidates. Most agree that brand recognition, visual presentation through a variety of methods, realistic presentation of police work, diversity of the agency and streamlined processes are necessary in today's recruiting environment (Ellis, et al., 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The question posed by this research embodies how can police agencies better attract and recruit potential police officer candidates in an era of increasing competition for the same applicant pool between the private sector, military and agencies themselves. The author believes that innovative marketing, through the extensive use of visual media, a streamlined applicant process, observable opportunity for advancement and the presentation of community service as the moniker of police work, will increase applicant pools without compromising current accepted hiring standards. The author will utilize a questionnaire survey based on recruitment recommendations discovered during literary research, to ascertain whether law enforcement agencies in Texas, in general, have adapted to generational changes as outlined in the literary review, or are continuing to predominantly utilize historical methods of recruitment. The survey was administered to a number of law enforcement agencies across Texas, inclusive of municipal, county and state agencies, with diversity in number of personnel, budget, demographics and geography. Over 95% of the surveys were completed and returned. The results of the survey will be analyzed to determine what recruitment methods are common to police agencies and what of those methods recommended in the literary research as being progressive are being utilized by the surveyed agencies. In addition, if, how and what percentage of the surveyed agencies are using visual media as a recruitment tool. Once this information is established, then conclusions and recommendations for further development of recruitment programs can be generated.

## **FINDINGS**

The literature review was conducted to ascertain basic traditional police recruitment techniques as well as innovative non-traditional techniques used by contemporary corporate entities as well as progressive police departments. Once these methods were identified, a survey was developed listing these techniques, and subsequently delivered to the targeted police agencies. The survey instrument was designed to solicit responses regarding current recruitment efforts and applicant processing, in order to reach conclusions relative to the author's hypothesis. The author hypothesized that Texas police agencies, in general, are not utilizing progressive recruitment techniques, which contributes to declining applicant pools. The literary review revealed that police agencies have been experiencing declining numbers of applicants, and the survey confirmed this. Of the surveyed agencies, 87% stated that their applicant pool has declined.

The instrument inquired as to both traditional methods of recruitment, as well as those considered progressive, whether these methods be utilized primarily in the corporate world, law enforcement or both. The responses indicated that the majority of agencies in Texas utilize traditional methods of recruitment, including newspaper advertisements, presentations at job fairs, police academies, colleges and military bases, as well as providing for some type of recruitment opportunity on their departmental web site. However, with regard to agency presentation via the internet, although all polled agencies indicated that they use the internet as a recruitment tool, 61% of the agencies indicated that their web sites were not progressive, nor tailored to attract a potential candidate. Of particular note, the author had an expectation that most,

if not all, police departments integrated some type of brochure, pamphlet or recruitment packet within their recruiting program. Unexpectedly, less than half of the polled agencies used this form of media as a recruitment tool. In addition, although most agencies advertise employment opportunities in their primary newspaper, less than 20% advertise in any secondary language periodical.

The survey asked several questions regarding progressive models of recruitment with the following results. Of the polled agencies, 90% do not offer an incentive to officers for recruitment of candidates, nor offer any type of hiring bonus to successful candidates. Only 16% of the surveyed agencies utilize television, radio, or trade magazines as an advertisement opportunity for recruitment. Further, only one of the agencies indicated that it currently uses billboards or mobile advertisements such as buses or taxis, as a recruitment tool. Similarly, regarding progressive hiring practices, including educational contracts and test preparatory tutoring, an overwhelming majority of responding agencies do not enlist this avenue of advertisement and recruitment opportunity. One of the most progressive ideas relative to police recruitment involves the use of human resources outside of the police department. These at large ambassadors of the agency actively recruit in their specific constituency, and then refer identified candidates to the agency. The questionnaire quantified that very few agencies take advantage of this opportunity for community involvement in the selection of their police officers.

As it relates to processes relative to recruitment, the instrument asked questions pertaining to recruitment budgeting, whether trained recruiters are utilized, exit polling of applicants and length of applicant processing time. What was discovered was that 85%

of the surveyed agencies do not have an independent recruiting budget, but rather included recruitment funding as a line item in another budget. A slight majority of police agencies did indicate that they utilize trained recruiters separate from Background or Internal Affairs units, and that exit polling takes place in an effort to gather information from applicants regarding how they became interested in their police department. The author was curious to determine whether a correlation existed between whether or not a department utilized an independent recruitment budget, and whether specifically trained recruiters were incorporated into the program, as well as if exit polling related in some way to an independent budget. The only discernable correlation was that agencies whom incorporated an independent budget for their recruitment program were twice as likely to utilize specifically trained recruiters separate from a Background or Internal Affairs unit. Interestingly, the instrument discovered that on average, the time required to completely process a candidate hovered around three months. This finding was surprising due to the reporting of the literature and the author's own general knowledge of the recruitment process that applicant processing is usually a lengthy and arduous endeavor.

## **DISCUSSION**

The issue surrounding this research centered upon the law enforcement community's current difficulty in maintaining a strong applicant pool. Several factors could be considered as significant to this problem, public perception of the police profession in general, overall low unemployment, competition between law enforcement, private industry and the military for the same applicants, and law enforcement recruitment efforts. This research considered law enforcement recruitment

efforts as the factor most able to be manipulated by police agencies to increase quantities of police applicants. The research question contemplated whether or not police agencies in Texas have or have not adapted recruitment practices to the current generational labor force. As discovered during the literary review, Generation Y, a group born primarily between 1977 and 2000 are vastly different from other generations. This group is motivated by personal development and self direction, is more of a visual group, due to being technologically advanced, and has an overall desire for a challenging, responsible position from day one. The author hypothesized that generally; police departments in Texas employ traditional methods of recruitment, but are not engaged in progressive models of recruitment nor have tailored their programs to the current labor force. A questionnaire survey was developed to assist in either proving or disproving this hypothesis.

As a result of this survey, the author confirmed that a majority of police agencies in Texas do utilize traditional recruitment techniques, but are not incorporating progressive recruitment methods. Of specific note, the finding indicating that all of the polled agencies use the internet as a recruitment tool, but only 39% stated that their internet sites were tailored towards recruitment, demonstrated the lack of understanding of the visual aspect of today's labor force. The internet can be a powerful marketing tool for any police agency. A department's web site is one of the first impressions that a potential applicant will have of a police agency. It is imperative that police agencies upgrade their web sites, engage in brand recognition and market their agency through the internet. Recognizing that the applicants of today have a visual nature, a natural

progression in recruitment of this group beyond the internet would be to incorporate television, mobile advertisements, billboards and magazine advertisements.

While the first three may seem cost prohibitive for smaller agencies, ingenuity and resourcefulness could facilitate use of these opportunities for recruitment.

The research further indicated that agencies have not adapted their recruitment programs to include recruitment bonuses for employees, or hiring bonuses to successful candidates. These are monetary incentives, which can be argued as having either more or less influence on recruitment in general. However, the fact remains that these programs are alternative incentives which are more and more becoming attractions for potential candidates and appeal to the rank and file police employee, whom are the face of any police organization and one of its primary recruitment tools. Another forward thinking recruitment initiative centered on integrating prominent community leaders into an agencies recruitment program, has yet to be developed by an overwhelmingly majority of the polled agencies. This program has vast potential, brings the community into partnership with the police department and costs little to implement. As evidenced from the survey, other recruitment tools such as education contracts and test preparatory tutoring should also be explored as means to attract candidates.

Regarding the recruitment process itself, the research surprisingly showed that the average time required to process a candidate was three months. This would indicate that the historical delay in processing candidates has been addressed to some degree. The research also yielded a probability that agencies whom incorporate an independent recruitment budget were more likely to utilize separately trained recruiters than those who budgeted recruitment into another line item. The use of specifically

trained recruiters is another important aspect of any recruitment program, especially in today's competitive market. A possible limitation that may have hindered this research was identified as related to the distribution of the survey instrument. Due to the fact that the majority of law enforcement agencies in Texas are comparatively small to mid-size, the author ensured that these size entities were well represented in the survey. It was assumed by the author that larger agencies, defined as those with over 200 officers, had the resources to operate an independent, progressive program, and therefore did not poll numerous agencies of this size.

The study of declining applicant pools as it relates to agency recruitment models is germane to contemporary law enforcement, due to the magnitude of the result of failure to adapt to the changing environment in recruitment, brought upon by a new generation of workers, increased competition for these workers and the impending retirement of the baby boomer generation. Any police department wishing to review its own recruitment program would benefit from this research by using it as a component of benchmarking to gauge its success or lack thereof, relative to recruitment of the current generation of police applicants.



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## APPENDIX