

PRECISION POLICING DURING COVID-19

Succeeding in Recruitment during COVID-19: Three Important Strategies from the Arlington, Texas, Police Department

Michael Speer, Steve Rickman, and Lt. Brook Rollins

Across the nation, many law enforcement agencies are experiencing challenges with staffing shortages. Exacerbating this problem are notable upticks in officer attrition due to early retirements amidst agency's efforts to recruit qualified and diverse applicants. The Arlington, Texas, Police Department (APD) successfully addressed these challenges with three strategies discussed in the resource below. These challenges agencies are facing regarding recruitment predate the economic stressors and rampant unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Arlington has experienced an increase in new applicants while maintaining its pre-COVID-19 attrition rate. As law enforcement agencies work to attract more diverse applicants with broader skill sets, COVID-19-related unemployment presents police departments with a unique opportunity to attract qualified and talented candidates that would have otherwise pursued other career paths.

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ESTABLISHING LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS TO FORM POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS FROM AN EARLY AGE.



APD's Lieutenant Brook Rollins highlights three distinct strategies (both of which existed before COVID-19, but have also proven effective during the pandemic). The first of these efforts is the Hometown Recruiting program, in which the APD proactively makes contact with local high school students. The department believes that establishing lines of communication with students helps create awareness of a police officer's job and humanizes the badge for young Americans while also offering them a clear, well-defined path to post-graduate employment.

Hometown Recruiting Program Participants

Hometown Recruiting program participants receive priority hiring status within the department, provided they graduate from college (notably, participants are granted tremendous latitude in this regard—priority status is guaranteed regardless of the school they attend or the degree they earn). While it is still a fledgling program (started in 2012), the department points to a participant who just recently earned a college degree as evidence that it is gaining traction.

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RECRUITING THROUGH ONLINE JOB-LISTING PLATFORMS

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced APD to explore digital recruitment avenues and techniques outside of its traditional recruitment strategies. Notably, Arlington has made significant gains by growing its footprint in online job-listing platforms such as Indeed. Indeed allows the department to conduct outreach outside of its typical geographical area. This new practice has prompted the agency to receive applications from across the country. APD has also begun conducting “virtual” preliminary interviews, which allows the agency to interview candidates at a distance first, saving them the trip to headquarters. If candidates advance to the next phase, APD can coordinate their physical evaluations with their other medical, psychological, and polygraph evaluations.

The department credits this practice with improving its ability to sustain recruitment capabilities that might have otherwise suffered because of the limitations on in-person contact by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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ADOPTING A CULTURE OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND TRANSPARENCY

Finally, Lt. Rollins highlights a progressive perspective on law enforcement, known as “procedural justice and transparency,” that has permeated every aspect of APD, including the manner in which it advertises itself and views prospective applicants. Procedural justice, originally implemented by former Chief Theron “T” Bowman, is an important aspect of Arlington’s recruitment process. It reflects and integrates the increasingly reform-oriented values of young people, who may previously have been previously reluctant to apply based on their negative perceptions of the police culture. Lt. Rollins points to these principles as one of the reasons the department has been able to maintain a positive relationship with its community and a key factors in the recruitment and retention of officers.

This resource is intended to highlight a set of strategies that one law enforcement agency has found useful and effective throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you or your agency would benefit from more information, please reach out to Jessica Dockstader at dockstaderj@cna.org