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# Recruitment and Retention in US Policing: Rethinking "Business as Usual"

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**Abstract**

Since the mid-1990s, policing has struggled to recruit and retain quality applicants. Although many efforts have been made to alleviate this problem, the situation persists. This paper offers alternative suggestions for the policing profession to alleviate its recruitment and retention crisis. The authors argue that it is time to look beyond typical human resource recommendations to fix this problem. The profession needs to begin to experiment with more innovative solutions if it is going to achieve more complete and quality staffing outcomes.



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# Executive Summary

As a profession, policing has been mired in a series of human resource challenges since the 1990s. Many agencies consistently report declining numbers of quality applicants, challenges filling authorized positions to achieve full staffing, and difficulties retaining personnel for the duration of a full career. In response to this situation, various government entities and police professional organizations have offered recommendations for how agencies can alleviate this crisis of recruitment and retention. These recommendations have not significantly improved agencies' ability to hire and retain sufficient quality personnel. It is time for policing to look at alternative solutions in the search for more effective ways to achieve more robust and stable staffing.

This paper offers a set of suggestions for individual agencies and the profession as a whole to consider in furtherance of improving the recruitment crisis. Because they are largely untested approaches in police human resource management, not all may be successful, at least as framed within this paper. Policing must, however, pursue greater innovation and experimentation. Suggested areas of improvement include the following:

- Modifying marketing and recruitment efforts to expand the diversity and volume of young adults who perceive policing as a viable career field to consider
- Analyzing the selection processes agencies use to reduce the time and burden traditional approaches place on applicants and the expense these efforts create for agencies
- Cultivating awareness among officers that they play a key role in recruiting future police officers as they perform their duties within their communities
- Considering how the orientation and structure used to train new officers might work against efforts to recruit sufficient diverse personnel
- Exploring how job sharing and part-time positions might enable agencies to retain personnel, even during life phases when personnel have demanding responsibilities as caregivers
- Examining how increasing the representation of women might alleviate some of the controversies surrounding policing and recognizing the changes that will be needed to achieve and sustain that increased representation
- Continuing to pursue workplaces that are welcoming to increase a wide range of diversity and inclusion efforts within policing

- Rethinking traditional entry points and career pathways through the ranks during a policing career
- Improving efforts to increase the retention of personnel by changing traditional organizational practices in ways that might make police careers more desirable and sustainable

Preserving some traditional approaches agencies have used to recruit and retain personnel (such as recruitment efforts at colleges and military facilities) might be necessary. But these traditional approaches alone do not appear to be sufficient to address the human resource crisis. It is time for the profession to engage in more innovative thinking and to experiment (and evaluate) better ways to make policing an attractive career. No singular change is likely to achieve the desired outcome, nor is the solution likely to be the same for agencies of all sizes and functions. The profession, however, can do far better if it is willing to expand its thinking and approaches beyond "business as usual."

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# Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, police and city leaders have lamented that the US is experiencing varying levels of "crisis" in the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel to work as police officers (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). A study by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence (2019) found that human resource experts working in government service rated policing as the most difficult government sector for filling vacant positions. The proportion of study respondents indicating that they were having a hard time filling policing positions increased from 15 percent in 2015 to 32 percent in 2019.

Certainly not all communities have experienced this police workforce crisis during the last quarter century. However, many government agencies and professional associations have conducted studies, convened meetings, and released reports documenting the recruitment crisis and offering potential solutions. The situation likely has not improved in recent years with the highly visible public outrage over high-profile officer-involved civilian deaths and calls to reform various aspects of police rights, roles, authorities, and budgets. Will those entering the labor market be attracted to careers in policing when that profession is experiencing a crisis of public trust and confidence, if not an existential identity crisis? How can policing transform aspects of its recruitment and retention efforts to make itself a more appealing profession and possibly alleviate some of the concerns that the public is currently expressing?

This paper offers some alternative ideas for seeking more diverse and qualified candidates for employment in policing and improving the ability to retain personnel once they have been hired. Some run counter to "business as usual" in terms of how agencies have thought about the hiring and training process and structured their workforces, and how society has traditionally viewed who polices communities and how their careers progress. These ideas are often at odds with tradition and prevailing cultural values relating to experience, deference to seniority, and the expectation that police leaders come up through the ranks of those they oversee (Crank, 2004; Hoggett et al., 2019; Rowe, 2006).

We recognize that these ideas are largely untested and fly in the face of tradition; they might be unpopular, and some, if tried, might prove to be poor approaches, at least as we envision them currently. However, US policing has been in a recruitment and retention crisis for a quarter century, and continued scrutiny on the police, calls for greater oversight and legislative restrictions, and efforts to "defund" agency budgets are unlikely to improve those circumstances. If the "best practices" persistently touted by the profession have not alleviated the recruitment and retention crisis, perhaps it is time for the profession to attempt different,

bolder, and more experimental approaches. Such efforts might help address current calls for police reform, make police work a more desirable career path for larger segments of the workforce, and positively change the diversity of US police personnel in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, education, and organizational culture.

# The Problems with US Police Recruitment and Retention

Before offering suggestions for changes to recruitment and retention, we must first consider some of the problems that have traditionally plagued these processes. These traditional practices explicitly and implicitly contribute to the recruitment and retention problems observed in policing. We concede that changing these practices may not be in the direct control of police organizations or leaders. For example, a police chief may have no direct ability to modify a retirement system, particularly in an agency with a patrol officer union.

## Fragmentation

US policing is highly fragmented, with more than 12,000 municipal (or equivalent) police departments and 3,000 county agencies (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Little or no coordinated effort is made to market careers in policing to potential applicants; each agency must do so on its own, which greatly reduces the profession's ability to collectively accomplish marketing and recruitment. Given the size of the average police department, many agencies are unable to engage in meaningful marketing and recruitment because of lack of resources and training opportunity.

The highly fragmented nature of police organizations requires applicants to apply and test with multiple agencies in pursuit of a single job. The testing and selection process can often take months because agencies have limited resources, constraining the ability of employers to move applicants through the stages of the screening process in a timely manner. Having applicants repeatedly complete identical or similar tests is inefficient for both candidates and agencies. Agencies expend finite resources to assess basic attributes and skills of a candidate, yet that candidate might have completed such an assessment several times recently with other agencies. Applicants become frustrated by the time, effort, and expense of repeatedly completing the complementary or even redundant screening stages for multiple agencies during processes that can take months.

## Media depictions

The way police work is characterized and marketed is not an accurate reflection of the work most police officers perform. Media depictions of policing tend to emphasize law enforcement, force, control, and aggressive tactics. Recruitment materials created by police organizations

tend to rely on visuals that emphasize many of these same themes. As a result, police work is characterized as a masculine, violent, coercive profession (Koslicki, 2021), even though much of what officers actually do involves problem-solving, conflict resolution, communication and interpersonal skills, and nonviolent, non-legalistic tactics. Potential employees who might be attracted to police work do not seriously consider this career field because of these misleading characterizations. Potential applicants may believe police officers are "warriors" and may not see this depiction as aligning with their perceived capabilities or interests, so they pursue other professions. Some who enter policing experience frustration (up to the point of leaving the profession) because the reality of the job does not match their expectations (Hilal et al., 2017).

## Culture

Perhaps as a result of, and a contributing factor to, media depictions of policing, the traditional culture of the profession often emphasizes masculine traits, such as physicality, force, coercion, and authoritarian behavior, even though much of what police officers do involves communication, collaboration, de-escalation, and problem-solving. Officers who do not naturally align with these traits might be viewed as less effective or less qualified during critical formative stages of their careers, particularly while in a pre-service training academy, while completing in-field training programs, and while seeking to "prove themselves" to coworkers early in their careers. Consequently, potential employees falling outside the stereotype of what a police officer should look like and how a police officer should behave may face greater chances of being removed from an agency or opt to leave the profession early in their careers.

## Staffing

Police organizations must staff their communities around the clock every day of the year, except in very small jurisdictions. As a result, police work schedules can be unforgiving and unaccommodating. Many senior leaders endured this situation during the early stages of their careers, working nights, weekends, and holidays while missing family and personal engagements. Organizations do not always consider innovative and alternative ways to approach work scheduling, and the range of available options is constrained by time, available workforce, and workload demands. Some agencies still require patrol personnel to rotate shifts regularly. As personnel are promoted, they frequently find themselves the least senior member of their new rank, which can return them to working less favorable work schedules. This situation can create difficulties for officers with care responsibilities for children and older family members, responsibilities that historically fall disproportionately on female officers.

Police organizations in the US tend to view sworn positions as primarily full-time. Few accommodations might be available for employees wishing to work part-time because of care

responsibilities, educational pursuits, preservation of personal well-being, or other reasons. Employees with a need or desire for part-time employment may find themselves between a proverbial rock (resigning from the agency) and a hard place (abandoning educational aspirations, placing dependents into structured care situations, placing personal well-being or family relations at risk by continuing to work full-time).

## Hierarchy

Police organizations generally expect personnel to enter at the bottom of the hierarchy and rise through the ranks, frequently over a long period of time. Police culture values seniority and judges the legitimacy of leaders by whether they have been "in the trenches" of front-line police work, with all the risks, dangers, discomforts, and inconveniences those experiences implicitly involve. Few agencies have entry pathways to allow personnel to enter (as a sworn employee) with a mid-grade rank (similar to the distinction between enlisted and commissioned military personnel) or to rise through the ranks on an accelerated pathway. The small size of the typical police department means agencies have limited candidates from which to select in making promotion decisions, because the only available candidates are current employees. Promotion may be a function of seniority more than qualification.

Police organizations tend to have "defined benefit" retirement systems. Employees are expected to work a minimum of 20 to 25 years. Leaving the agency earlier can greatly reduce future pension payments to a level not proportional to employee contributions. As a result, employees who might be best served seeking employment elsewhere continue to work in policing because of the "sunk cost" they have awaiting in a future pension. And those who might consider shorter careers in policing are likely discouraged from doing so because they will not accrue sufficient retirement benefits.[1]

## Legitimacy

Policing is facing a legitimacy crisis, with calls for reformation and "defunding" the police reducing the desirability of the profession in the eyes of those entering or preparing to enter the workforce. Economic challenges since the Great Recession of 2008 have constrained municipal budgets, placing limits on hiring and on pay and benefits that cities, counties, and

[1] Distinctions may exist between earlier generations and those currently entering the workforce. Young adults today may expect to change jobs multiple times during their working lives, unlike their parents who might have expected to spend a career with a single employer or with fewer employers. The degree to which this sentiment is accurate for those entering policing careers is not yet clear, and survey data from college students suggest that pay and benefits remain factors attracting young adults to careers in criminal justice (Gibbs, 2019).

states can offer to police personnel (Giblin & Nowacki, 2018). Police work has inherent difficulties, and society asks the police to take on substantial responsibilities with limited training and resources to achieve successful outcomes. The round-the-clock nature of police staffing requires much of police personnel and their families. In an era of heightened scrutiny on police personnel and agencies, policing careers might become less desirable for both those new to the labor market and those already working in policing. Consequently, many might look to other career opportunities.

# Reframing Marketing and Recruitment Efforts

Many marketing and recruitment efforts in policing seem to emphasize themes that can easily be conveyed in a single photograph. Officers in tactical gear. Groups of officers standing in front of police vehicles. An officer searching a civilian prone against a brick wall. The images resonate immediately with most viewers, recalling the law enforcement aspects of police work. Agencies need to understand that the visuals and themes that they include in recruitment materials transmit messages to their potential applicants about police work, policing in that specific agency, and the types of police officers that agency employs and might be seeking (Koslicki, 2021). Agencies may find it easy and convenient to perpetuate what they have always done in terms of recruitment efforts or to emulate what is being done by peers. However, thinking intentionally about the messages conveyed by recruitment materials and the types of potential applicants who are attracted or dissuaded by those messages would be wise.

Marketing and recruitment decisions are often made by experienced members of an agency's leadership. Those leaders might rely on recollections of what attracted them to police work, coupled with their understanding (if any) of social media platforms and presumptions about what motivates today's youth and might attract them to policing. As a result, agencies rely on mid- to late-career police personnel (who are typically white men) to determine what messages and marketing mechanisms will reach today's youth and motivate them (especially women and people of color) to consider careers in police work. To be done well, marketing and recruitment materials need to reflect an understanding of what potential applicants want from their future profession. Some evidence suggests that those interested in police work want a career that emphasizes mutual respect, safety, integrity, honor, and opportunities to serve and that allows them to make positive changes in their community and be a role model to youth—a career that places them in the role of a community guardian, rather than a warrior (Carothers et al., 2020; Gibbs, 2019).

How can policing signal to potential applicants the realities of the work? How can agencies signal that they are interested in applicants who reflect diversity in terms of demographics, education, interests, and aspirations (Aiello, 2020; Hilal et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2020)? How do agencies convey that applicants who are women, are people of color, are LGBTQ,[2] or lack military or criminal justice backgrounds will be welcomed as equal employees? Understanding how to answer these questions and creating materials that market and recruit for diversity in

[2] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning.

policing are essential. Doing so will help improve the diversity of those in policing and open new and deeper pools for recruitment, helping agencies increase the number of quality applicants about which hiring decisions can be made. For example, one likely reason police work continues to struggle to increase the representation of women in the profession is that policing is still framed as a masculine occupation (National Institute of Justice, 2019; Silvestri, 2018). Emphasizing police work as about control, violence, and enforcement can deter many from considering this profession. If prospective employees had a better understanding of what police officers do daily, those interested in helping and serving professions might give policing greater consideration.

As part of rethinking overall recruitment and marketing efforts, agencies should rethink where, when, and how they proactively engage with potential employees. Campus-based recruitment efforts should not be limited to seeking those majoring in criminal justice. Seeking employees who have majored in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, humanities, education, business, social work, or health may be valuable. Recruitment efforts cannot be singular or one-size-fits-all. What draws Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and female students to pursue careers in criminal justice differs from what attracts white male students (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019; Gabbidon et al., 2003; Krimmel & Tartaro, 1999; Stringer & Murphy, 2020). Samples of students studying criminal justice are often more diverse than policing ranks, likely because female and BIPOC majors have interests that lie elsewhere within the justice system (Stringer & Murphy, 2020). Agencies might benefit by encouraging, coaching, and mentoring female and BIPOC criminal justice majors to consider careers in policing.

Making ride-alongs a part of recruitment efforts can allow agencies to show potential applicants more about police work while providing them the opportunity to speak with a range of current personnel to learn more about both police work and the specific agency (Todak, 2017). Efforts to show potential candidates for employment the realities of police work in a given agency can extend into agency sponsorship of internship programs. The Topeka (KS) Police Department works with a local hotel that provides free lodging and some meals for out-of-state summer interns as a giveback to the agency and city (Anderson, 2020). Topeka Police Department believes that this program has allowed non-local interns to learn about the community and the agency, potentially helping improve diversity in subsequent applicant pools.

When agencies have the resources, providing educational incentives can be effective in the recruitment and retention of personnel. Paying officers more for having an associate's, bachelor's, or graduate/law degree can link pay with an objective standard (the acquisition of a college degree) and can increase the education level of a workforce, which research demonstrates brings various benefits to police organizations (see Paoline et al., 2015). An educated police workforce can help buffer an agency from many of the policing issues that are

under public scrutiny. Although education is not a perfect inoculation against poor performance or problematic conduct, it offers tangible benefits. Agencies that can afford to incentivize obtaining college degrees should consider doing so to attract stronger candidates and help retain personnel.

The policing profession as a whole would be wise to create marketing and recruitment materials that more accurately and completely convey the duties performed by police officers. Although moments of excitement, danger, and dynamic activity are a part of policing, they are the exception rather than the norm for most officers. Marketing that humanizes the profession, emphasizing community engagement, problem-solving, capacity building, and service to the community as key elements of police work might be advantageous (National Institute of Justice, 2019; Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021). Highlighting the diverse duties officers perform and the diverse duty assignments available to employees over the course of their careers can shed new light on the potential of careers in policing. Recruitment materials showcasing officers working with collaborative intervention teams, organizing community events, and engaging in other community-based initiatives might broaden the public's awareness of the actual work officers perform, appealing to additional types of potential applicants. Agencies and leaders should work through their state and national professional associations to pool resources and collectively generate content for print media, video media, and social media that conveys that police officers are problem solvers, advocates for vulnerable populations, and providers of vital community and social services, all of which are dominant aspects of police work.

# Assessing the Selection Process

Agencies still struggle to identify the highest quality applicants through the selection process (Hilal et al., 2017), suggesting a need for more research to help understand how to determine the best qualified individuals from a pool of applicants. Employers are understandably worried about "false positives" (hiring recruits who ultimately prove ill-suited for policing) by missing "red flags" and other concerns. Agencies should, however, also be concerned about "false negatives" in the selection process—situations in which applicants are removed from serious consideration when they might make good police officers. Agencies need better selection tests and benchmarks that do not create false negative judgments for female and BIPOC applicants and false positive assessments for any applicants. Part of this process involves agencies considering their selection process. If agencies and leaders lament that they do not end up with diverse lists from which to make hiring decisions even though they have diverse applicant pools, the problem might lie with the agency's selection standards and process, not the quality of applicants.

Agencies should carefully analyze their recruitment efforts and the selection processes that they use. Are the recruitment strategies and initiatives paying desired dividends in terms of the achieved size and diversity of the applicant pool? Selection processes are designed to narrow a pool of applicants to a list from which employees can be chosen. In that process, screening steps are used to remove some applicants and elevate the status of others. For many agencies, those steps will also result in applicants formally withdrawing or simply ceasing to engage further in the process. Agencies should try to understand why and when applicants are removed or self-separate from the process, as well as who is being lost at each stage. This effort might include contacting self-separators to see why they chose to remove themselves from the process, which might provide insights into aspects of the process that are problematic in the eyes of prospective employees. Not every problem will be within the agency's ability to control or correct, but some concerns might be addressed or alleviated.

A prime example of an issue that many agencies have reconsidered in recent years is recreational use of marijuana. As most states legalize the sale and possession of recreational marijuana, larger portions of the population will report having used marijuana and having used it recently. For many working in law enforcement and making decisions about hiring processes and outcomes, the recreational use of marijuana might still be viewed as a disqualifier for candidates. Although the percentage of students reporting daily use of marijuana has been relatively stable in recent decades (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019), the rates are increasing among younger students (8th and 10th graders), and around one-third of high school seniors report using marijuana in the past year. As legal access increases, agencies will

need to determine where to draw the line on recreational use (e.g., disqualifying those who have ever used, have used routinely, have used recently). Agencies might treat marijuana use similarly to alcohol or tobacco use. Although recreational use runs counter to current federal law, the growing availability of recreational substances purchased legally (based on state law) will likely increase the rate of use among those entering and within the labor force. Agencies may need to reconsider their stance on recreational substance use among both applicants and current personnel.

Analyzing their recruitment and selection processes might help agencies achieve improved hiring outcomes. Agencies might find that some aspects of their hiring processes actually hamper their ability to select diverse and qualified recruits. Other steps might be outdated, unnecessary, or unhelpful. We recognize that agencies do not fully control all steps of the selection process. Depending on state and local legislation and policies, some steps in the process are dictated (if not fully controlled) by human resource units, civil service commissions, state agencies that issue standards and credentialing regulations, or police and fire boards. Agencies might need to help those external bodies understand how aspects of the process might create barriers or disincentives. Police leadership is responsible for letting external bodies know if the processes they have created, rules they have established, or tests and benchmarks they have selected are working against achieving the best, most diverse pool of candidates possible. These external bodies have a duty to help increase diversity in policing and overcome the current crisis confronting the profession.

# Streamlining the Selection Process

Too often, the application and selection processes in policing are burdensome and redundant for candidates, as well as time consuming and expensive for agencies. Agencies often require highly similar steps (e.g., application, written exam, physical fitness exam, interview board, background check, psychological assessment, polygraph, medical exam) in the application and selection process. A candidate seeking to enter police work might expect to apply to multiple agencies and complete some of those screening steps multiple times. For example, many agencies begin the selection process with the written and physical fitness exam once candidates have filed an application, using the results of these stages to create a shorter list of applicants for subsequent phases in the hiring process.

Doing those initial selection steps separately for each potential employer takes considerable time for an applicant and often requires redundant steps (e.g., completing multiple applications with the same personal information, educational background, and work experience; repeatedly demonstrating the ability to meet state physical conditioning standards; completing multiple written exams of similar nature). For applicants, completing such steps requires time and personal resources (e.g., transportation and lodging costs to appear for testing, taking time off work if applicants already have employment, arranging childcare). At the same time, agencies must invest resources to process multiple applications, coordinate and schedule testing dates, and conduct testing.[3] Written and physical testing requires personnel to oversee those processes.

If an applicant applies to 10 agencies, they must complete 10 application processes (with requisite supporting documentation) and presumably will take 10 written and physical exams. Even before the applicant has advanced past the initial steps of the selection process, 10 agencies will have gathered redundant information, administered 10 threshold written exams, and administered 10 physical fitness assessments, with each of these steps costing the agency and its community. An alternative model would be to ask this applicant to complete a single application, threshold written exam, and physical fitness exam and allow those results to be

[3] Some agencies have begun to charge application fees to cover the cost of initial testing materials and processes. Although these fees might alleviate the immediate costs of selection, research is needed to determine whether the practice harms agencies by restricting applicant pools.

shared with the 10 agencies. The result would be the same at a fraction of the effort, time, and cost to the agencies and applicants.[4]

Some collectives of communities do pool resources to streamline the recruitment process for agencies and applicants. For example, the Lakes Area Law Enforcement Employee Coop is a collective of nine police departments and two sheriff's offices in northwestern Iowa. An applicant participates in a single application and testing process (in this example, the written and physical exams, but other testing processes could also be pooled). Upon applying, applicants select to which agency or agencies they are applying. Agencies can add additional selection processes as they deem appropriate, and several agencies can simultaneously be evaluating the same candidate. These small agencies pool their limited recruitment and selection resources to cast a wider net in seeking applicants while respecting the time and resources of potential personnel by avoiding the use of redundant elements of the basic application and testing process.[5]

What would regional or statewide equivalents to this approach look like? Although agencies would have to give up some control over specific aspects of the screening process (e.g., a single written exam would have to be selected and accepted by all participating agencies; oral interview boards could involve personnel from multiple agencies), the cost savings could be substantial. Subjecting an applicant to only a single process (up to a given point in the selection process), with the cost shared by multiple agencies, substantially reduces the financial, time, and effort burdens of the selection process for both applicants and agencies. Successful applicants would also quickly be eligible for later stages of the selection process with multiple agencies, keeping them engaged in the process.

Parallels can be seen between such an approach and the college Common Application process. Potential students use a single portal and input key information a single time. They select which schools receive that information. The participating schools can customize what information they wish to receive from applicants. Likewise, a Police Common Application

[4] Many agencies might opt to use the state physical fitness requirements new trainees must meet at entry in the police academy as their physical conditioning assessment. We recognize that the information agencies capture in applications might vary slightly and that they might use different entry written exams. We suggest that most of the variation is a function of random tradition and local customs. Coalitions of agencies or even entire states might be able to agree on basic attributes needed to apply for a policing position and on a set of entry-level exams that might generally assess an applicant's basic reading, writing, and mathematic skills, for example. There are challenges to achieving agreement, but these challenges are not insurmountable.

[5] Testing consortia are likely not a panacea, and more research is needed to understand how they function and what unanticipated consequences they might generate. Consortia usage might have benefits for applicants and agencies, but little empirical knowledge is available to understand the positives, negatives, and best practices. A clear risk is that participating agencies might have to accept the lowest common denominator among their peers in terms of testing practices and standards. Progressive and rigorous agencies might have to accept weaker standards or testing supported by the majority.

system could allow participating agencies to adjust the information they require (e.g., some might want all job history, others up to 10 years of job history) so they have some measure of control over what they know about applicants. The applicants could select the agencies or regions where they are interested in being considered. Agencies might also be able to indicate which selection steps they wish to use (e.g., opting to include or exclude the use of polygraph exams), recognizing that they might have to accept a specific test that is not their first choice (e.g., accepting a psychological screening based on the administration of the MMPI and a clinical interview when the agency has historically used a different psychological inventory).

A complementary way of streamlining the application process involves rethinking why large delays and interruptions are built into the process. For example, agencies might define ways to have applicants complete steps in clusters. Interviews could be clustered with psychological and polygraph exams. Background checks could be conducted by retired investigations personnel working on special contracts to allow them to provide full attention to complete this stage as expeditiously as possible.[6] Interviews with the chief or sheriff might be conducted on the same day as the medical exam. This streamlining does not necessitate cutting corners. Rather, agencies might rethink why such large delays and interruptions are built into the process, requiring months to accomplish what might be accomplished in weeks.[7] One example of such streamlining is the Topeka (KS) Police Department hiring process, which used to take six to nine months but now takes as little as six weeks (Maue, 2019).

[6] Care must be taken in such a process to ensure that investigative personnel are hiring based on current standards, expectations, and preferences within an agency. This approach could backfire if investigators are operating based on a traditional view of the hiring process. Agency leaders seeking more progressive or inclusive practices should ensure that those involved in the process understand and support those efforts.

[7] Some agencies have achieved success in streamlining hiring processes by making hiring a continual effort rather than something done in batches or cycles. This practice would likely be feasible only for larger agencies engaged in greater volumes of hiring. Shifting from a mindset of hiring being a massive annual process to a streamlined continual process might help move applicants through the process more efficiently.

# Every Officer Is a Recruiter

Every officer is a potential recruiter. As officers are in the community performing their duties and interacting with the public (including casual conversations at restaurants and convenience stores), they are representing their agency, its values, and its style of policing. Officers should embrace this role and be on the lookout for civilians who might be good candidates for policing. They can encourage people to consider the profession and their agency. And they should do so liberally, assuming there are not apparent automatic disqualifiers. Officers can speak about the benefits of working for their agency, answer questions, and encourage people to participate in volunteer work in support of the agency. Some agencies have implemented recruitment bonuses, rewarding employees for each application they generate and each hire that is ultimately made because of their outreach efforts. If agencies do not have the financial structure to afford or administer bonus pay, other incentives (such as additional vacation or leave time) could be considered.

Agencies should actively pursue interns, including those who are not majoring in criminal justice. Although research has demonstrated the value of college education in reducing problematic policing outcomes (Kappeler et al., 1992; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001), associations have not been clearly established between the major of a college-educated officer and behavioral or attitudinal outcomes (see Carter & Sapp, 1990; Carter et al., 1988; Paoline et al., 2015). Welcoming interns with diverse educational backgrounds might help agencies develop workforces that collectively represent different academic strengths and attributes. When working with interns, officers should understand that they are not simply showing a student about their job—they are potentially recruiting someone to work in the profession.

Agencies might link candidates with an assigned mentor to help answer questions the candidate might have and involve more personnel in elements of the recruitment and selection process. The mentor can keep the applicant engaged throughout the selection process. The applicant could be offered the chance to do a ride-along with their mentor to learn more about the community and agency.[8] Once a hiring decision has been made, agencies could consider hiring recruits in support service roles until they can be placed in an academy seat. Recruits gain experience in the agency, start learning about the organization and policing, and can do additional ride-alongs with officers, all while earning income.

[8] Mentors and field training officers (FTOs) should be separated for a given candidate/trainee. The relationship a prospective or new employee has with a mentor is and should be different from the relationship they develop with an FTO. Mentors ideally will play long-term supporting roles; that relationship can become complicated if the dynamics of an FTO relationship are introduced.

# Changes in Training New Officers

Recruitment and retention efforts are connected with when, where, and how academies train new officers. The philosophy underlying how an academy treats students can dissuade recruits from completing training or create the cracks in an officer's commitment to the job that will ultimately result in the fracture of a resignation. Academies might rethink their traditional approaches on many fronts, such as how recruits are treated (and the messages that treatment conveys) and what recruits are taught (and whether curricula are truly effective in preparing better officers or simply meet state-mandated content requirements). Although there are times when society needs officers who are willing and able to be warriors, much of the public wants the police to carry out routine operations with a guardian approach (O'Toole, 2020). Creating holistic training that emphasizes police as guardians of communities, defenders of rights and against abuses, and protectors of the vulnerable could be an important shift in the culture of policing. This cultural shift holds promise for making police work attractive to a broader segment of the workforce, potentially creating deeper applicant pools from which to make hiring decisions.

Many academies continue to use a stress-based paramilitary model that governs and guides all aspects of their operations. This model is intended to prepare recruits to handle the stress they will confront in the field with stoicism, bravery, and a focus on mission.[9] The approach places recruits in the role of the powerless. They might be yelled at and belittled by instructors. They are restricted in when and how they respond to questioning from instructors. Recruits' transgressions and failures are addressed with public shaming, physical punishment (e.g., push-ups or running laps), and, at times, verbal abuse. What messages does this treatment convey to recruits about how they are valued and respected within the organization? What messages does it convey to recruits about how to treat powerless individuals as they perform their duties as officers upon graduation (O'Toole, 2020; Rahr & Rice, 2015)? Stress-based approaches are ill-suited for creating innovative, thoughtful, and adaptive personnel who can operate successfully outside of narrow training and tactics.

Stress-based approaches work against diversity in policing; they result in lower completion rates for female recruits (68 percent completion rate versus 81 percent for male recruits) (Reaves, 2009). In contrast, academies operating with non-stress models (which emphasize physical training and academic achievement within the context of a supportive instructor-trainee relationship) have similar completion rates (89 percent) for both male and female

[9] Nearly one-quarter of academies classify their approach as all or mostly stress-based or more stress-based than non-stress-based (Buehler, 2021).

recruits (Reaves, 2009). Police leaders and academies should pay close attention to when and why recruits fail to complete, or self-separate from, academy training. Although the stress model persists in some police academies, there is no evidence that it produces more successful officers. Stress model academies may reinforce policing as a masculine profession and create a hypermasculine culture that discourages women from entering and remaining in policing (Prokos & Padavic, 2002; Rossler et al., 2020).

Physical ability tests too often lack validation by demonstrating connection with being successful as a police officer (Roman, 2020). Tests tend to emphasize upper body strength, which may place some women at a disadvantage. After the state of New Jersey modified the physical test standards for entry into police academies in that state, an analysis found that women failed the test at a rate 13 times greater than male applicants; 31 percent of women failed the test compared with 2 percent of men (Ford, 2019). Although certain physical skills or strength might be needed in unusual and rare circumstances, their inclusion in tests tends to overlook that less fit officers might be able to compensate using other skills, such as teamwork and communication, to achieve a successful resolution. In addition, most agencies never again assess physical capacity, which may speak to the arbitrary nature of these standards.

Academies need to rethink the basic skills and competencies conveyed to trainees. The structure of pre-service training in the US, with state accrediting and standards boards articulating the minimum number of hours of training to be provided in a range of content areas, loses sight of the broader goals and objectives that might be pursued in pre-service training. A study of chiefs in Minnesota found that many of those leaders lamented that the state-mandated curriculum resulted in officers who were taught what to think rather than how to think. The latter is more challenging to teach, but to chiefs it was more important to the future success and performance of new recruits. Chiefs wanted a program that prepared trainees by "developing critical thinking, conflict resolution, public speaking, and interpersonal communication skills" (Hilal et al., 2017, p. 520). Chiefs wanted those skills put ahead of law enforcement skills and tactics, which they felt they were able to effectively teach new personnel.

Academies might also rethink how technology and remote learning can be used to better meet the needs of personnel in rural areas or personnel who might need to remain full-time employees in other jobs during academy training. Utah State University has begun a program offering online classes for trainees in rural communities. The students meet each weeknight and watch a live video feed from the main academy to a satellite facility. Remote students can ask questions, respond to questions, and interact with instructors and peers. Agencies local to the rural trainees provide some of the hands-on skills training. Students travel to the main academy for some instruction, such as emergency vehicle operations and firearms training (Kauffman, 2019). This format allows recruits to go through the academy while still primarily

living in their (rural) residential community and working full-time. COVID-19 has forced many academies to rethink operations and explore ways to integrate remote learning into their instructional processes (White et al., 2021). Although some policing skills still need to be taught and learned in person, significant parts of the academy experience can be delivered via technology. For residential academies, this approach can reduce the time students have to spend physically located at facilities and away from their families and other obligations, which might reduce a barrier to entry into policing. Although conventional thinking might hold that in-person training is optimal or the only way to offer pre-service instruction, COVID-19 is demonstrating that a middle ground might exist between fully in person and fully online.

Pre-service police training in the US varies in length and content (typically based on state training mandates), but the format is largely consistent. Academic training is delivered as a continuous block before recruits advance to field training in a continuous block. There might be value in experimenting with alternative structures, such as recruits completing half or two-thirds of their academic training, being sent to the field to complete one to two blocks of field training, and then returning to the academy to complete their academic instruction before they complete field training. Weaving academic with field-based learning might strengthen the integration of both learning processes. Some academic learning might be enriched if recruits have some experience with field application.

Agencies and academies should reconsider the validity of grooming, hair, and appearance standards, particularly as they seek to draw in more diverse employees. The traditional view of these matters (e.g., prohibitions on visible tattoos) has leaned quite conservative, but the legitimate need for specific rules is less apparent in terms of officer safety, officer performance, or public trust and confidence in police. Forcing diverse officers to assimilate with specific standards that reflect policing's traditions as a white, male, working-class profession might work against marketing, recruitment, and retention efforts, particularly for female officers. Unjustifiable standards restricting nail style, hair length, or facial hair have specific effects on diversity (Kringen & Novich, 2018; Palmer, 2020) both in the academy and on the job.[10] Standards and rules that implicitly or explicitly favor white male heterosexual officers reinforce that the policing workplace is not built to consider the needs and preferences of others. If the preferences of female and BIPOC recruits for something as arbitrary as hair length and style requirements are overlooked, the message sent to those recruits is that the workplace

[10] Kringen and Novich (2018) studied training academy hair style and length restrictions and how they related to efforts to diversify the study agency's workforce. Female recruits were held to a very restrictive standard whose purpose was to expedite the transition from physical conditioning training back to academic training. The convenience of the academy scheduling was placed ahead of efforts to diversify the police workforce by allowing a rule that had a clear effect on female recruits and was unrelated to officer safety or performance.

is white and masculine and they must conform and adapt (Prokos & Padavic, 2002) because their preferences and priorities do not matter.[11]

It is time to rethink the ways in which pre-service training experiences are structured and delivered. Do we understand why candidates are failing? Are we doing what we can to remediate academic and physical failures (versus integrity failures) and self-separation in academy training? Although agencies that operate their own academy have more immediate control over training issues that might need to be corrected, all agencies should be considering what role, if any, the training process might be playing in recruitment, academy completion, and officer retention rates. It is important to avoid sentimentality over tradition. The historical way police training has been delivered (full-time, in person, at a centralized location) was not chosen with pure rationality; rather, these aspects of police training reflected the technological limitations that existed when police training academies emerged in the middle part of the 20th century. The profession must consider whether new technologies, pedagogies, and ways of thinking might allow more innovative methods for delivering training, including having more variable pathways by which candidates can secure their pre-service academy training and enter their policing careers.

[11] Prokos and Padavic (2002) discuss the experiences of male and female recruits in defensive tactics training. One instructor would specifically target women, serving as a more skilled attacker against the recruit. Another instructor demonstrated on only male recruits. Female recruits felt less confident in their skills and received less attention and coaching. In a job that emphasizes defensive tactics as an essential element of officer safety, diminished confidence among women might increase their likelihood of leaving the profession.

# Job Sharing and Part-Time Officers

Part-time officers might be common in small agencies to provide additional service coverage without requiring health insurance and other benefits associated with full-time employment. What is less common in the US is the opportunity for officers to transition to part-time employment while fully retaining health insurance and other critical benefits. Many Western nations (such as England and Australia) have implemented job-sharing programs that allow officers to shift to part-time work hours and share a position within the organization. Officers responsible for providing care to family members (children, elderly relatives, etc.), officers completing educational experiences, and officers nearing retirement might be prime candidates for such arrangements. If an employee is contemplating separating from the agency because of external circumstances, the agency should consider ways to reduce their work hours (proportionally reducing pay and accrual of pension benefits) while preserving other employee benefits. The agency can gain in this situation by retaining an experienced employee while showing that it cares for its employees and respects the complexities and demands of their personal lives.

This type of program increases the number of employees being provided benefits, and that cost is not insignificant. However, it might be a way to retain employees. Given the costs associated with recruiting, selecting, hiring, and training a new officer to the point of baseline competency, it may often make more economic sense for an agency to incur the benefits cost of part-time employment to retain experienced personnel.[12] Such part-time positions could also be attractive to officers near or at retirement eligibility. A veteran officer might be willing to stay on the job part-time as a form of phased retirement. The agency can retain critical skills while training or transitioning a new employee into a specialized function, as needed. How this arrangement might work would be up to each community or agency and would likely involve local rules or policies regarding city or county human resources. The situation poses complications, but many of those complications are imposed by organization rules and systems and are not insurmountable barriers.

[12] Although the cost of providing health care to a part-time employee might initially seem to make this situation financially untenable, note that the cost of recruiting, screening, selecting, and training a new officer is estimated at between $20,690 and $59,000 (see Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2018). These estimates cannot possibly account for the lost experience and expertise associated with employee resignations. An agency might be both compassionate and financially responsible in allowing employees to transition to part-time status if the alternative is employee separation.

# Women in Policing

Although considerable recent attention has focused on racial and ethnic diversity in US policing, the profession has a far greater problem with proportional representation of female officers. Policing was historically work performed exclusively by men. In the first half of the 20th century, inroads were made to integrate women into policing roles, although early female officers were normally allowed to work in only select duty assignments (not patrol operations) and had few or no opportunities for career advancement. Women were first allowed to work as patrol officers in Indianapolis in 1968. The representation of women in policing slowly increased for the following three decades, but the growth has plateaued since the late 1990s (Cordner & Cordner, 2011). Women are further underrepresented as one moves up the chain of command within policing, a situation that becomes more pronounced among agencies serving smaller jurisdictions (Hyland & Davis, 2019).

The benefits of employing women in policing have been known for decades (Martin, 1980), yet the US continues to underperform on this issue compared to other advanced democracies around the world (Murray, 2021; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013; Ward et al., 2020). Female officers are less likely to use force in excess (Schuck, 2017; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005), are the focus of fewer lawsuits (Schuck, 2017), and generate lower payouts for excessive force liability lawsuits (Lonsway et al., 2002).[13] Female officers are less likely to express support for aggressive tactics (Stepler, 2017). Agencies that employ more female officers report lower overall rates of civilian complaints (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2016), and female officers generate fewer complaints than their male counterparts (Brandl et al., 2001). Female officers are more likely to pursue higher education and often are more receptive to organizational changes, such as the implementation of community policing (Orrick, 2008). Increasing female representation may help agencies reduce many of the negative outcomes at the heart of the current crisis surrounding US policing: controversial uses of force, poor police-community relations, public mistrust in the police, public reluctance to cooperate and co-produce community safety with the police, and public perceptions of the police as less legitimate (Lonsway et al., 2002; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005).[14]

Reviewing the research that highlights why women are underrepresented in policing, Todak (2017) groups insights into four areas that must be addressed to achieve greater

[13] Although women make up 28 percent of officers in the Madison Police Department, they accounted for only 15.6 percent of use of force incidents in 2019 (see Madison Police Department, 2019).

[14] Not all research suggests that gender inclusivity in policing is a panacea. Schuck & Rabe-Hemp (2005) caution that increasing female representation is not, by itself, enough to reform policing.

representation: attracting women to police work, recruiting female applicants, selection and hiring processes, and retaining female officers. Male and female officers indicate similar reasons and motivations for entering policing (Gibbs, 2019). Members of the public may view policing as a masculine occupation, making it less appealing to women as a career field of interest (Brown et al., 2020; Murray, 2021; Rossler et al., 2020; Silvestri, 2015). Even among university students studying criminal justice, men are more likely to report interest in careers in policing (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Diaz & Nuño, 2021; Krimmel & Tartaro, 1999). Until the "ideal" vision of a police officer shifts away from masculine traits (Silvestri, 2018), recruitment strategies might not be enough to attract women to consider policing as a viable career in which they can achieve success. As Clinkinbeard and colleagues note, "If young women have trouble imagining themselves as officers, it may be difficult to recruit them" (2020, p. 2; see also Diaz & Nuño, 2021).[15]

Policing has not done enough to adopt workplace policies and practices that are friendly toward officers who might have primary caregiver responsibilities (Brown et al., 2020; Murray, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Rossler et al., 2020).[16] Current policies often include heavy reliance on shift work; insufficient maternity, family, or medical leave; and the absence of part-time employment options (Rossler et al., 2020). Women may select duty assignments that provide more flexible work schedules because of their caregiver role (Murray, 2021; Polk & Armstrong, 2001) at the expense of career advancement (Archbold et al., 2010; Gau et al., 2013). The culture of policing emphasizes masculinity, heroism, risk taking, and competition in ways that amplify that policing is viewed as a job for young white heterosexual men. Those who do not exemplify those attributes can fall outside of the "in-group" (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). Women often face social exclusion, sexual harassment, and limitations on their career trajectory (Brown et al., 2020). Women may encounter barriers to equal advancement, particularly if they are not seen as putting the job first, being competitive and hyperactive, and showing aggression on the streets. Women's career trajectories might be derailed, delayed, or impeded if they exhibit more feminine workplace conduct, emphasize family (including maternity leave), or seek assignments that allow them to prioritize their caregiving responsibilities. They might find that their preferred or only available options are limited non-patrol roles, and, when promoted, they might not be conferred the same automatic respect, authority, and deference granted to male supervisors.

[15] Readers are encouraged to examine the 30x30 Initiative (https://30x30initiative.org/) and its associated resources.

[16] Cardel et al. (2020) provide an instructive framework for considering the experiences of women in academia, examining the "chutes" that impede careers of women faculty and encouraging a focus on developing "ladders" that help alleviate these issues. Considering the needs and experiences of women in policing through this framework could be useful within the profession.

Gendered messages shape how women are perceived as leaders (both formally and informally) (Murray, 2021; Silvestri, 2018). Many police departments do not employ any female officers or have no female officers in positions of leadership (Matusiak & Matusiak, 2018). Women may opt to take career paths based on their external care commitments rather than what might be best for their professional advancement. As a result, female officers might opt not to pursue career advancement or, when they do, might have records deemed less competitive by their employing organization. Women who have taken family medical leave or maternity leave might be viewed as having weaker organizational commitment (Silvestri, 2018). These factors contribute to female officers being underrepresented in leadership roles (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Underrepresentation perpetuates itself when new female officers scan their organizational environment and see few (if any) available role models both within policing and within ranked positions (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

Agencies must do more than simply hire female recruits in pursuit of greater gender parity. Although recruiting women is critical to advancing gender equity in the workplace (Clary, 2020; Nowacki et al., 2021), success in recruitment will not be sustained if the underlying masculine police culture and overt structures and policies create work environments that are not welcoming to women (Clinkinbeard et al., 2020; Desmond et al., 2020; Murray, 2021; Prokos & Padavis, 2002; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). Policies that allow female officers to feel valued and wanted within the policing workforce are important. Enacting such policies might mean addressing evaluation systems that might be biased against female (and BIPOC) officers (Desmond et al., 2020).[17] Establishing mentorship programs can empower female officers and help provide role models for their prominence within the workplace (Clary, 2020; Rossler et al., 2020; Murray, 2021; Todak, 2017). If agencies fail to take seriously the process of mentoring and integrating female officers into the workplace, they risk creating a "façade of inclusivity" (Matusiak & Matusiak, 2018, p. 327).

Harassment and sexism are normalized in far too many agencies, often in subtle ways. Too often, only the most egregious misconduct or toxic environments are reported and investigated. When asked questions such as "Have you experienced sexual harassment?" few female officers respond affirmatively. However, female officers report high rates of behaviors that would often constitute sexual harassment (e.g., coworkers commenting on their appearance, coworkers joking about sexual behavior in a way that made them uncomfortable) (National Institute of Justice, 2019). Female officers might face less overt harassment than in the past, but many feel as though they do not fully fit into their workplaces (Rief & Clinkinbeard,

[17] Drew and Saunders (2020) provide an instructive overview of gender and promotion within Australian policing that highlights some of the ways to support the advancement of women in policing ranks while identifying circumstances that worked against that objective. Further research in US contexts is needed to develop an evidence base for programs and procedures that will be effective in moving policing to greater gender equity at all ranks.

2020), experience subtle sexism (Silvestri, 2018), and must deploy adaptive strategies daily to resist gender inequality (Murray, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). Research continues to find that female officers report that gender inclusivity is a problem in policing, whereas male officers and male police executives deny those problems exist (Cordner & Cordner, 2011; Murray, 2021). This disconnect speaks to the heart of the problem. The group we seek to attract and retain within policing continues to express the lack of gender inclusivity, a situation that works against all four pillars for achieving greater representation of women in policing (Todak, 2017). Yet too many top police executives (who are men in 97 percent of US agencies) fail to see that gender inclusivity remains problematic. Those with the most power to correct the problem are unable to recognize and acknowledge that problem. Until such recognition is achieved, the prospects for improvement are limited.

# Diversity and Inclusion

Matters of diversity and inclusion in policing remain important in efforts to build healthy and functional police-community relations. Although the policing profession as a whole has improved in the representation of BIPOC officers, those gains tend to be centered in large urban agencies (Hyland & Davis, 2019; Nowacki et al., 2020). BIPOC officers are underrepresented among supervisors and police chiefs relative to their prevalence in policing. As the US becomes increasingly diverse in terms of the racial and ethnic composition of its population, policing must endeavor to maintain similar representation within the profession, which can be accomplished, in part, by working to increase diversity among leaders.

Within the context of racial and ethnic diversity, policing needs to pay additional attention to its intersection with gender inclusivity. Much of the racial and ethnic diversity in policing is through male officers, whereas women of color continue to be underrepresented.[18] Research suggests that white female and Black male officers tend to work to integrate themselves into policing by adopting the dominant culture, which is primarily influenced by the ideologies of white men. Black female officers may feel isolated from informal police networks, challenging efforts to attract and retain these candidates (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Other research suggests that BIPOC women face greater levels of hostility and intimidation from within policing, including during academy training, resulting in attrition of recruits (Burlingame & Baro, 2005).

Framing police work as a masculine occupation unsurprisingly results in police cultures and informal social systems that feel less inclusive to others. The implications of this situation are not limited to women. Men can likewise be caught in the trappings of the culture of masculinity. Emphasizing masculinity has profound implications for women in policing, but such emphasis might be even more difficult for male officers who do not demonstrate high levels of masculinity, regardless of their sexual orientation (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). For example, policing does little to be friendly to employees with heavy involvement as caregivers, which can include male officers (Cordner & Cordner, 2011). Sexual orientation and gender identity might condition officers' experiences with police culture. Research finds an informal hierarchy in some agencies that places heterosexual men in the position of primacy, followed by lesbians, heterosexual women, and homosexual men (Brown et al., 2020; Colvin, 2009; Mennicke et al.,

[18] Underrepresentation can also be a function of competition for those in underrepresented classes, both within and outside of sworn policing careers. Larger state and federal agencies might have competitive advantages over smaller rural agencies. Investigative and security careers in the private sector might offer better pay, benefits, and work conditions.

2018). Women are not expected to exemplify masculine traits, but men who fail to exemplify masculinity might be perceived as even further from an ideal they are expected to innately demonstrate.

A hypermasculine culture dominated by white male officers might be less inclusive of and supportive toward those outside of this culture. The conservative leanings of most police officers may render police organizations unfriendly places for officers with gender identities that do not firmly align with traditional social expectations. The rapidly growing social acceptance of differences in gender expression and identity will increasingly necessitate that all aspects of police operations, including hiring, locker rooms, culture, and other employment practices, be appropriately inclusive and welcoming. Being less inclusive of BIPOC, female, LGBTQ, and less masculine officers can profoundly affect retention in a profession in which informal support networks can be essential to officers as they experience normal life stressors or critical incidents on the job. In the absence of a supportive workplace culture, personnel are more likely to separate from policing in response to stress, challenges, and adversity.

Likewise, workplace policies and practices might favor those inclined to pursue masculine reward structures and the circumstances allowing such pursuit. Those who receive the most prestigious duty assignments and most easily advance through the organization are often those who show "drive" and "commitment" to the workplace. Those with caregiver obligations, for example, might be viewed as less dedicated than peers without those commitments and as less suitable for advancement, despite having strong leadership skills and potential for leadership growth.

Policing needs to carefully consider how culture and workplace practices shape the experiences of officers who do not fit the conventional image of police officers. This careful consideration can be difficult to do in a profession so dominated by white and male officers. Improving diversity and inclusion is essential to allow policing to recruit from broader segments of society, to maximize the retention of all employees, and to better develop trusting and functional relationships with communities that are growing in diversity and inclusivity. Policing must understand how to attract and retain officers who do not closely align with the stereotype of policing as a white, male, heterosexual, masculine profession. As long as those controlling recruitment and retention efforts misread what factors are creating disincentives to those they seek to bring into their organizations, substantial and sustained advancement with diversity efforts is unlikely.

# Rethinking Points of Entry and Pathways Through the Ranks

For years, agencies have experimented with allowing those who are too young to enter police academies to work in supporting roles. Those still in high school may be involved in police explorer programs, and high school graduates may be cadets or Community Service Officers or serve in another similar role. The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department hires youth ages 18 to 20.5 to work as cadets. The program is intended to provide part-time work in support services for young adults attending regional colleges and universities. Cadets can apply for police officer positions and begin the academy at age 20.5.[19] The Memphis Police Department recently relaunched a Police Service Technician (PST) program that recruits high school seniors into support service roles. PSTs can qualify to join the department after their 21st birthdays, while gaining experience, meaningful employment, and the opportunity to earn the 54 college credits required to be hired by that agency (Barrett & Greene, 2020).

These types of pre-service employment programs can be an important way to bridge the years between completing high school and being old enough to qualify for entry into policing careers. They can provide participants with valuable experiences,[20] positive mentorship, and the opportunity to have meaningful employment. Agencies might ideally combine these efforts with requirements or expectations that employees be simultaneously working to complete some level of college education.[21] The inclusion of mentorship efforts might help enhance the successful recruitment of female and BIPOC candidates for future policing employment. Programs might be designed to provide participants with not only training on the support services roles they play in the agency but also curriculum around ethics, law, leadership, and principles of democratic policing.

[19] Allowing cadets to enter the police academy at 20.5 years of age ensures that they will graduate around their 21st birthday, the minimum age to be granted police certification in Missouri.

[20] Young adults entering these programs might be particularly susceptible to negative cultural influences that emphasize less desired policing approaches or cultural values. Agencies should carefully consider whether such bridging opportunities might work against efforts to reform police culture. Even in states where individuals can qualify to work in policing before the age of 21, agencies might consider using these programs to provide prospective officers the opportunity to mature and develop better judgment before they are given the full power and authority of a certified police officer.

[21] Local philanthropic or corporate groups might wish to help support the cost of the program or provide tuition assistance for participants. The St. Louis program is supported by the St. Louis Police Foundation, an independent nonprofit that provides the department with a range of philanthropic support.

Non-sworn career opportunities in field-based support services are often intended for those who are too young to enter policing careers. Cadet and Community Service Officer programs are often structured as part-time opportunities for young adults. Agencies might consider offering long-term non-sworn career opportunities in roles that support field operations. Although many tasks completed by patrol officers and detectives require someone with full policing powers, both duty assignments spend a large volume of time completing work that does not require that authority. Such work might be more appealing for some potential applicants, creating opportunities to add depth to applicant pools by not viewing police work so narrowly (i.e., rejecting the view that only sworn personnel authorized to arrest and use force do "real police work" and that non-sworn personnel perform only support functions that are clearly something other than "real police work").

This area is ripe for experimentation and learning on the part of the police profession. Could non-sworn personnel handle many aspects of the investigation of property offenses, fraud, and crimes involving computers? The idea here is not simply the forensic aspects of such investigations. Instead, could an employee with strong computer technical skills and some level of training in law and investigations effectively handle the investigation of identity theft or credit card fraud up to the point of securing an arrest warrant? Could officers responding to a domestic disturbance turn that situation over to a social worker once assault or other criminal actions have been ruled out in pursuit of a more comprehensive resolution to that conflict? Could community outreach workers handle matters of homelessness or substance abuse and addiction? Progress has been made in some of these areas, but growth opportunities are abundant if agencies are willing to think creatively and learn from the process. Non-sworn personnel can perform many of the non-patrol tasks that currently occupy appreciable sworn personnel in many agencies.[22]

The profession might also consider alternative points of entry into a career as a sworn police officer and leader. Traditionally, US police organizations have required employees to enter at the bottom of the organization (as a patrol officer) and accrue experience over the course of years before slowly advancing up through the ranks. As a result, most who enter policing do so as young adults, and most who are in positions of leadership have been employed in policing in the same agency for years. The British police have been experimenting with two alternatives to this tradition: Direct Entry (DE) and Fast Track (FT).

[22] Non-patrol assignments are highly sought after in many agencies, especially urban, high-crime agencies. Assignments in which officers can take refuge from the stress and pressure of patrolling assignments with high call volumes and high rates of violence can be important to long-term retention. In other words, solving one staffing problem (using non-sworn personnel in support services roles to free sworn personnel to return to patrol assignments) might create new staffing problems (by increasing employee absenteeism, medical leave, and attrition).

DE is a system that allows highly qualified candidates to complete an 18-month course of study and enter policing with the rank of superintendent.[23] The DE system seeks to create pathways for those with strong career experiences elsewhere in the public or private sector who wish to make a professional transition into policing to capitalize on public service motivation (Silvestri, 2018; Smith, 2016). The system allows those with strong potential to have immediate positive effects on policing and those with highly desired technical and leadership skills to advance to a rank approximate to the rank they might have held at their current age had they entered policing as a young adult.

FT is a complementary but distinct system that allows those selected from a different pool of highly qualified candidates to advance more quickly in a policing career (College of Policing, n.d.). Those selected for FT are already employed in policing. The system streamlines their progression from constable (front-line officer) to inspector (roughly equivalent to lieutenant in US policing), with the ultimate objective of expediting their advancement to the rank of superintendent or beyond. Those selected for the program are provided training and experiences designed to provide them with the skills to operate at a high level of authority within their police service on an expedited timeline.

The larger scale of British policing[24] makes systems such as DE and FT viable in ways they might not be in many US policing agencies, given their smaller size. Informally, FT might exist in some agencies for some personnel, although the informality of such opportunities might mean that they are not equally or openly available to all officers. What implications might DE and FT have for rethinking career entry points and trajectories in US policing? Are there ways to reimagine how at least some police personnel enter and advance through their careers? Those entering leadership in British policing via DE were thought to "bring no inhibitors, no cynics and no preconceived ideas of the culture within which they will be operating" (Smith, 2016, p. 317). They might be less prone to groupthink (Janis, 1972) and narrow conceptions of behaviors or solutions to potential problems.

Beyond logistical barriers involving human resources, civil service, and labor associations agreements, issues of DE or FT within policing do face complications from police culture. Police culture places heavy value on experience and seniority as mechanisms that confer internal status (Hoggert et al., 2019; Silvestri, 2018; Smith, 2016). Many believe that rank must be earned through time working on the front line of the job (Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2014); experience working the front line engenders legitimacy that supervisors have done what they

[23] Because the British and US rank systems vary in terminology, it is difficult to find a clear US analogue for the rank of superintendent. In a large US police department, a superintendent might be roughly equivalent to a captain or a major.

[24] Each British police force generally employs 1,000 to 3,000 sworn personnel, meaning even their smallest forces are larger than all but a handful of US police agencies.

are asking others to do. Having a long operational background allows leaders to claim authority, which those without lengthy experience (including those outside of policing) are unable to claim. This argument is embedded in culture and not empirically validated, but it becomes a powerful tool to dismiss calls for reformation or change, particularly those from outside of police organizations. Political and community leaders calling for change can be dismissed as lacking the experience and perspective needed to understand the complexities and nuances of policing. Police culture can maintain that only those from within have the experience, insights, and authority to determine how to fix problems.

The policing profession might also consider expanding the use of lateral entry and creating pathways for officers to "boomerang" (to separate from policing for a period but then return to the employing agency). Skilled expertise can be found by allowing officers to move across agencies while retaining (or improving) rank and seniority. This practice occurs in some areas in the US but is not widespread. In some states, pension systems are a barrier to officers moving agencies during their careers. Allowing boomeranging of both former employees and the former employees of others can be a way to secure experienced officers. Personal circumstances might require a qualified officer to leave the profession; allowing that officer to return within a reasonable period of time can be a way to retain that experience. These ideas might require agencies to push their state credentialing and oversight bodies to reduce barriers when they exist, which might include streamlining reciprocity or steps needed to earn credentialing within a state if an applicant is validly credentialed in another state. In these processes, agencies must be careful to avoid hiring a peer agency's problematic officer.

# Retention

Turnover of personnel is an expensive problem. Agencies invest heavily in the process of recruiting, screening, selecting, and training new personnel. When applicants are unsuccessful, recruits fail before completing probation, or officers leave an agency prematurely, there are associated direct and indirect costs to agencies in terms of financial investments, time and energy, and (in the case of resignations) the loss of knowledgeable and skilled personnel. Prior sections presented potential methods agencies can use to maximize their return on investment in the areas of recruitment and selection. This section expands on improving officer retention.

Employee compensation plays a role in retention, but increasing compensation is not the entire solution to this problem. Rates of voluntary separation (resignations) are lower in agencies with better salaries, although research finds that agency use of economic incentives (pay increases based on officers' demonstrated skills and level of education), the presence of defined benefit retirement systems, the presence of collective bargaining, and lower rates of community disorganization all play more important roles (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2018).[25] On the latter point, communities with greater levels of community disorganization may be areas where the public holds lower attitudes toward police, resulting in strained community relations and more conflict in community interactions, factors that might increase the difficulty of the already stressful and challenging duties officers perform.

One way to engage patrol personnel in special duty roles is to create a system of short-term assignments to non-patrol responsibilities. For example, patrol personnel might be temporarily assigned to work with detectives, with property room technicians, or in administrative support roles. This system can serve to retain newer personnel (some roles might be open to relatively junior officers who otherwise lack seniority to qualify for a non-patrol assignment). In addition, it can provide officers with additional training and developmental experiences while allowing agencies to assess the capacities of officers for various non-patrol roles. For example, an agency might have officers rotate from patrol to the traffic unit for a period of two to four weeks. Other officers might rotate into the investigations unit to provide supplemental support in property crimes investigation. Such short-term assignments provide officers a temporary respite from patrol, expand their understanding of agency operations, and provide temporary personnel resources in select duty assignments. In the longer term, some agencies limit how long unranked personnel can spend in support

[25] Schuck and Rabe-Hemp's study is informative, although they were unable to account for aspects of the workplace (policing approaches, management styles, the extent to which employees feel they "fit" within the organization, etc.) that might also be expected to influence employee satisfaction and the decision to resign.

service roles outside of patrol or investigations assignments. Having rules stating that an officer can only work such an assignment (patrol, traffic, neighborhood services, etc.) for a fixed term before rotating back to patrol creates greater access to those duty assignments for less senior personnel.

Agencies should strive to create a culture in which even new employees feel appreciated and encouraged and to build mechanisms that ensure open opportunities for all employees to offer input and share ideas. Leaders should never presume that they have internal trust and perceived legitimacy from their workplace (Hoggett et al., 2019). Rather, they need to actively cultivate those outcomes among all employees and consciously work to sustain them once they are established. Likewise, creating more heterogeneous organizational cultures can make policing workplaces more diverse, inclusive, and accepting. A workplace culture and leadership style that encourages input and involvement across the ranks through teamwork, participation, and the development of personnel can help employees remain motivated and engaged in their workplace (Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021). It is often noted that public confidence and trust in the police is fragile, taking a long time to create and only moments to destroy. The same can apply to employee confidence and trust in leaders. Once it is cultivated, employees might be reluctant to seek employment elsewhere.

The summer of 2020 brought a new round of scrutiny on US policing and the emergence of calls to "defund the police." Organizations that were already struggling to maintain their staffing levels through the acquisition of sufficient qualified applicants have reported that they are facing growing challenges (Young et al., 2022). One potential buffer to some of these challenges could be agency consolidation. Even relatively modest-sized communities often have a patchwork of overlapping and adjacent municipal, township, county, and special jurisdiction agencies. For example, Madison, Wisconsin, is policed by the Madison Police Department as well as (in some areas) the Town of Madison Police Department (the City of Madison and Town of Madison are two separate governmental units and policing jurisdictions). The community is also policed in some areas by the University of Wisconsin Police Department, the Wisconsin Capital Police, more than a dozen agencies serving small suburbs, the Dane County Sheriff's Office, and the Wisconsin State Patrol. All these agencies are providing policing services and competing for prospective employees while following different policies and procedures. Some have more difficulty in recruitment and retention given their small size and scope of operations.

Although consolidation is not a panacea, it might be a way to alleviate some of the pressures on recruitment and retention this paper has specified. US policing is highly provincial and small in scale, which has both advantages and disadvantages. As calls to reform and defund the police continue to be heard, consolidation is one response that would help to alleviate some of the public's concerns. Advantages in recruitment and retention would certainly be expected if consolidation occurred in at least some parts of the US. Large agencies will have more

resources for recruitment and retention while offering more career opportunities for officers and greater flexibility with matters such as shift scheduling.

# Conclusions

Policing in the US continues to be mired in a crisis of legitimacy and public support that exacerbates a long-standing struggle to recruit and retain sufficient qualified applicants. The common recommendation issued to correct the recruitment and retention crisis have generally not achieved their objectives. Thus, the time might have come for the policing profession to engage in 'out of the box' thinking in the search for more effective ways to enhance recruitment and improve retention. This will mean agencies will have to experiment with non-traditional approaches and subject those experiments to research in an effort to build an evidence-base of effective strategies. That police agencies struggle in recruiting and hiring sufficient new personnel to preserve staffing levels should call into question the efficacy of the common practices. This paper has attempted to offer a broad set of recommendations that agencies and leaders might consider as they struggle with recruitment and retention. We readily concede that many of these recommendations have limited supporting research evidence.

The policing profession as a whole must engage in broader efforts to market the profession in a realistic way to potential personnel, as well as the general public, whose view of policing is often the result of fictional media portrayals. At the same time, as new strategies are deployed, structured research and experimentation is needed to support the development of a strong evidence base that will inform an understanding of what works in police recruitment and retention practices. Failing to build such an evidence base would seem to doom the profession to continue to struggle with staffing, including underrepresentation of women and BIPOC personnel. Much work needs to be done, and that work must be supported by research to ensure that agencies are not only improving their staffing levels but also making hiring decisions that advance efforts at diversity, inclusion, innovation, and reform.

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