Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer

*Challenges, Opportunities, and
Strategies for Success*

COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

**POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM**

Contents

Letter from the Director of the COPS Office

Dear Colleagues,

In July 2016, President Obama convened law enforcement and civil rights leaders, as well as members of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, for a candid, solutions-oriented dialogue about improving police-community relations. There was consensus among participants that further discussions were needed to focus on recruiting for a diverse workplace, and on the challenges, often during the hiring process, that agencies experience in making that a reality.

In response to this meeting, President Obama asked the COPS Office to explore these topics and provide additional recommendations for law enforcement agencies as they work to improve the recruitment and hiring process. Together with the Police Executive Research Foundation (PERF), the COPS Office hosted the Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer forum in September 2016. This publication is a companion to the Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century forum convened in partnership with Strategic Applications International.

The hiring forum brought law enforcement executives, human resources professionals, and other stakeholders together to explore hiring rules and procedures that both support and challenge hiring those candidates who are psychologically suited, qualified, and have the temperament to be police officers. But beyond rules and procedures, it is critically important to look at the hiring process to ensure that those candidates who are hired meet the high standards of the profession.

The forum participants' forthright discussions and varied insights and experiences can be of great value to Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) commissions, agency HR personnel, state civil service boards, and others concerned with officer hiring and retention. I commend PERF for the important contribution they have made to American law enforcement by convening this forum and preparing this report.

The benefits of hiring individuals who not only reflect the communities they serve but also embody American law enforcement values of justice and service will benefit us all long into the future. This report is an excellent place to start.

Sincerely,

Ronald L. Davis
Director
Office of Community Oriented Policing Service

Letter from the Executive Director of PERF

The American policing profession may be facing the most fundamental questioning of its legitimacy in decades. The very essence of policing is being debated in many cities, often because of controversial video recordings of police officers' actions. Community trust has eroded, and the professionalism of the police is being questioned. At the same time, far too many officers are being killed in the line of duty, in many cases in cowardly ambush attacks. All of this has made community members and police officers concerned about their safety and has prompted leading police officials to go back to the beginning and take a fresh look at the police officers they are hiring. Do the officers represent the values of our communities? Do they share the philosophy of policing that we are developing for the 21st century? Do they have the skills and talents they will need to do the job we want them to do?
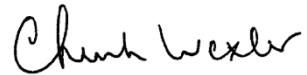
Policing used to be a profession shared within families from generation to generation. We all know families that count many officers among their sons and brothers and uncles, and sometimes their daughters, sisters, and aunts as well. But, sadly, these days when PERF gathers a large group of senior-level police executives together for a meeting and I ask them, "How many of you would like to see *your* children become tomorrow 's police officers?" very few, if any, raise their hands.

The country is facing a looming crisis in the hiring of police officers. Agencies continue to rely on hiring standards that were created decades ago, for a different philosophy of policing and a different generation of police officer candidates—even while many cities are having trouble finding enough suitable candidates to keep up with retirements and fill vacant positions. Today's young people considering a job in policing expect agencies to be quicker, more nimble and transparent in their hiring processes and decision making—and for many young people, especially in minority communities, policing is not seen as an appealing career choice in the current climate.

However, there are signs of hope, innovation, and change. At the September 13, 2016, forum "Hiring for the 21stst Century Law Enforcement Officer," police agency leaders, labor representatives, professional association executives, academicians, civil service managers, and others directly involved in

police hiring discussed the issues facing the profession and explored new ideas and approaches. Their experiences and insights, presented in this report, provide a valuable resource that should help agencies of all sizes better understand the common challenges they face.

Sincerely,

Chuck Wexler
Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum

Acknowledgments

Introduction: Shaping the Policing Profession for the 21st Century

> "To build a police force capable of dealing with the complexity of the 21st century, it is imperative that agencies place value on both educational achievements and socialization skills when making hiring decisions. Hiring officers who reflect the community they serve is important not only to external relations, but also to increasing understanding within the agency."
>
> *– President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*

The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (task force) recognized that a police agency's process for hiring new officers can be the foundation of effective, procedurally just policing. In its final report, the task force highlighted the importance of hiring officers who reflect the diversity and values of the community, and who have both the mindset and the skills needed to engage with the community. The task force encouraged states to establish high standards for who qualifies to be a police officer, and it recommended that agencies ensure that the officers they hire possess "the character traits and social skills that enable effective policing and positive community relationships."[1]

The task force emphasized *why* the issue of hiring is so important to policing in the 21st century, but it did not go into great detail about *how* agencies can improve their hiring standards and procedures. That type of specific guidance was beyond the scope of the task force. However, as a follow-up to the task force's report, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) organized a day-long forum titled "Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer." Held on September 13, 2016, in Washington, D.C., the meeting brought together approximately 50 expert practitioners, primarily in the fields of police standards, screening, and hiring. The meeting was moderated by Chuck Wexler, executive director of PERF.

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[1] President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), 51, https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf.

Diverse personnel, diverse perspectives

The majority of forum participants were sworn and civilian personnel from a range of police agencies of different sizes and from different regions of the country. They included lieutenants, captains, command personnel, and chief executives. These practitioners were selected because their agencies had implemented innovative hiring programs that have shown promise in their communities and that may be useful models for other jurisdictions.

The forum also included representatives from the following entities and disciplines:

- Labor organizations in policing

- State agencies responsible for police standards

- Professional associations representing police chiefs, sheriffs, women in law enforcement, Hispanic command officers, mayors, the transgender community, and police trainers

- Municipal civil service agencies

- Practitioners in the field of police psychology

- Academic experts

They were joined by PERF staff members and representatives of the COPS Office and other federal agencies (see the complete list of forum participants on page 62). Their charge was to explore how police agencies can make effective hiring decisions that serve their individual organizations and advance the policing profession as a whole.

> "Whether it's building trust and legitimacy, fighting crime and violence, implementing new technologies such as body cameras, or addressing the challenges of police use of force—there isn't a challenge that we're facing right now that doesn't point back to the issues of recruitment and hiring."
>
> *– Ronald L. Davis, Director, COPS Office*

Three overarching themes

The forum covered a wide variety of issues. These ranged from detailed aspects of the hiring process (such as agency policies on candidates' past drug use) to "big picture" issues, such as hiring philosophies, advancing diversity, and addressing implicit bias among officer candidates. The session also included discussions of the practical aspects of streamlining the hiring process and of organizing and operating police cadet and internships programs to introduce high-quality candidates into the hiring process

This report summarizes the major issues explored in the forum. These issues are organized around three themes:

- **Hiring candidates who share the values and vision of the community and the department.** This section explores how some agencies are using the hiring process to do more than disqualify individuals who fail to meet basic standards. Rather, more and more agencies are using the process to "hire the positive"—that is, to attract and ultimately hire people who reflect the values and vision of the law enforcement agency and the community. This section also explores new ways of thinking about such traditional disqualifiers as past drug use (an increasingly complex matter, given the trend toward marijuana legalization or decriminalization in many states) and applicants' financial difficulties (which may be a result of poor economic conditions nationwide). This section also examines the role of polygraph exams, psychological screenings, and the National Decertification Index, a relatively new and underused tool to help agencies screen candidates in a more comprehensive, multijurisdictional fashion.

- **Making the hiring process more efficient.**
  Traditionally, the police hiring process in most agencies has been slow and cumbersome. As a result, some agencies are losing qualified candidates to other departments, and in some cases, the policing profession is losing highly attractive candidates to other professions. This section of the report explores what some agencies are doing to shorten the hiring process and make it more efficient and user-friendly to applicants. Forum participants emphasized that speed and efficiency in hiring are especially important among the younger generations—Millennials and Generation Z[2]—who make up the bulk of people now entering the workforce.

- **Advancing diversity and inclusiveness in the hiring process.**
  This section examines how agencies are meeting their goals of building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities they serve, while also ensuring high-quality candidates and a process that is fair to everyone. Hiring Forum participants described new approaches to "growing their own candidates" through programs such as police explorers, cadets and internships. They also discussed the important role that background investigators play not just in screening and evaluating candidates, but also in shaping the "culture" of an agency.

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[2] Definitions vary, but Millennials are generally thought to include persons born in the 1980s to mid-1990s, while Generation Z, also known as Post-Millennials, the iGeneration, or the Homeland Generation, includes persons born beginning in the mid-1990s to early 2000s.

In addition, this report examines a number of other issues confronting today's police hiring authorities. These include, for example, whether visible tattoos undermine the image of police officers that an agency may wish to convey, whether to raise the minimum age for new hires, and how the hiring of civilian employees can support agency goals while relieving some pressure on the process of hiring sworn officers. The report also discusses new thinking about educational requirements and physical standards in the hiring process.

Discussion, recommendations, and promising practices

In each chapter, the report presents an overview of the key issues discussed in the forum. In addition, the report presents a number of specific recommendations and promising practices for agencies to review. In this respect, the report builds on the foundation established by the *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* by presenting practical and useful information and action items for agencies to consider and implement.

Nexus of recruitment and hiring

This forum followed a separate session on police recruitment, also sponsored by the COPS Office. Like the hiring forum, the meeting on police recruiting brought together experts from multiple disciplines and multiple agencies. The recruitment forum explored innovative ways to attract diverse, qualified, and community-oriented people to the policing profession in the first place—in other words, to get them in the door. As a complement to that meeting, the hiring forum centered on how to efficiently screen and evaluate those candidates who have expressed an interest in policing, and how to get the best candidates through the hiring process and out into the community as 21st century police officers.

Together, recruitment and hiring play a major role in shaping how police agencies develop, grow, and ultimately succeed. As COPS Office Director Ronald Davis noted at the hiring forum, there are few major issues confronting policing today that do not stem from recruitment and hiring on some level. The two COPS Office–sponsored forums provide guidance on how agencies can move forward in a unified manner on both fronts.

1. Hiring Candidates Who Share the Values and Vision of the Community and the Department

"About three or four years ago, we started to look at our hiring process in terms of our outcomes. We're trying to find the right individuals who we can train to be the kind of officers we want. We can give them training, but if they are not coming in with those human qualities that you want, we can't train those. So we say 'Hire the heart, train the brain.'"

— Karianne Thomas, Deputy Chief,
Kalamazoo (Michigan) Department of Public Safety

Traditionally, police agencies have used the hiring process primarily as a way to identify and exclude candidates who do not meet certain agency standards. Applicants who pass a basic written examination and other minimum entry requirements are put into a background investigation process that focuses almost exclusively on trying to uncover issues in the candidates' backgrounds that would disqualify them from service. For some candidates, it feels as if they are being treated more like criminal suspects than job applicants.

Participants at the hiring forum did not discount the importance of weeding out candidates who lack the ethical foundation, moral compass, and basic capabilities to be a police officer. In fact, much of the discussion focused on how to improve systems and procedures to be more accurate, discerning, and efficient in identifying unsuitable candidates.

However, many forum participants emphasized that in the 21st century, police agencies need to use the hiring process to do more than simply disqualify the negative. Agencies need to use that process to *proactively identify and hire the positive*—the candidates who possess the values, character traits, and capabilities that agencies are looking for in their employees. For many forum participants, that change in perspective about the basic purpose and ultimate value of the hiring process was seen as a critical first step toward improving the system and getting better outcomes.

Identify key traits and characteristics

What are those positive traits, characteristics, and skill sets that agencies need to hire for in the 21st century? And how can agencies measure and evaluate those qualities? While the answers to those questions will vary somewhat from agency to agency, forum participants offered some helpful suggestions.

The first step is for agencies to clearly identify what specific traits and characteristics they are seeking in their officers. These are the qualities that go above and beyond the minimum standards that are established by many state Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) agencies. Each agency's list will be guided in large part by the policing philosophy of that agency. Still, forum participants identified a number of fundamental qualities that all agencies should embrace, which include the following:

- Integrity

- Service orientation

- Empathy

- Communication and human relations skills

- Self-control

- Team orientation

- Problem-solving skills

Several forum participants noted that while the traditional approach to police hiring has skewed heavily toward the "warrior" aspects of the profession, agencies today need to focus attention on recruiting and hiring for the "guardian" role that police officers must be prepared to play. In fact, some forum participants argued that agencies should concentrate most of their attention on ensuring that applicants coming into the system have the necessary qualities of the guardian, because the warrior elements of the job can be taught.

> "You have to understand what your community expects of your police officers, and implement those expectations. If you don't have a relationship with the community and your officers aren't exemplifying the behavior the community wants, you're not going to be able to recruit the people you want to hire."
>
> *—Commander David Robinson, Dearborn (Michigan) Police Department*

Identifying the key traits that applicants should possess must be more than an internal brainstorming session. Agencies should also solicit the input of community members. What are their expectations? What qualities and skills do residents, business owners, civic leaders, and others want to see in the officers who police their communities? After all, these are the people who are the primary recipients of police services, and they have a vested interest and a unique perspective on what constitutes effective policing. If agencies are not asking for the community's input on the hiring process, they are not getting a complete and accurate picture of the workforce they should be looking to build.

> "When we looked at our process, we started by trying to identify what type of officer we would like to see in the coming generation. We're trying to focus more on officers with problem-solving skills, communication skills, and interpersonal skills. There's a lot in policing that we can teach to an officer, but we don't believe that we can teach the fundamental human ability to interact well with others."
>
> *– Brian Maxey, Chief Operating Officer,*
> *Seattle (Washington) Police Department*

Operationalizing the process

Once agencies have identified the core set of traits, characteristics, and capabilities they are looking for in officer candidates, they need to operationalize the process of hiring people who match those ideals.

Clearly, that process starts well before an applicant ever takes a written test or enters the background process. It begins with how and where agencies recruit potential candidates in the first place. As Dr. Patrick Oliver, Director of Criminal Justice Programs at Cedarville University, stated, "Once you know what you're looking for, where do you go and find that kind of a person?" For example, in the search for candidates who possess the full range of traits needed by today's police officers, recruiting and hiring go hand-in-hand. Agencies can't screen for and ultimately hire their strongest and most well-rounded candidates if their recruiters have not identified those people and encouraged them to start the process. This is called "Targeted Selection," and it is considered an especially effective recruitment method.

Within the hiring and screening process itself, evaluating and measuring the desired qualities and traits of officer candidates are not simple tasks. They require effort, resources, and some creativity on the part of hiring agencies. Major James Handley of the Baltimore Police Department noted that civil service tests are currently based mostly on cognitive abilities. Baltimore police are working with the city's human resources department to update the test so that it measures key personality traits as well.

Other jurisdictions are expanding their oral interview process to focus more on community-oriented skills and capabilities. For example, the Dallas (Texas) Police Department conducts in-depth interviews with candidates that include questions about how they would handle various situations that an officer will likely encounter in the community. Patricia Marsolais, Director of Dallas Civil Service, said the interview and assessment process for recruit candidates is being structured in a similar fashion to the assessment center the city uses for police promotions.

In Kalamazoo, Michigan, candidates are given scenario-based questions that address the city's "fair and impartial policing" approach and that touch on a variety of human experiences, as opposed to only the traditional roles of a police officer. In addition, candidates participate in ride-alongs with police officers that include interactions with a community-based group. This exercise serves two purposes: it helps the department evaluate the skills of the candidate in relating to and communicating with community members, and it gives the candidate a realistic view of what police work entails.

Another approach suggested by some forum participants is to provide special consideration for candidates who have engaged in activities that support the characteristics and skills the agency is looking for. For example, candidates could earn points in the hiring process for community service or volunteer activities, in which they demonstrated the ability to work with diverse communities in different settings. This would be similar to the extra hiring "points" that some states and agencies give to candidates with prior military service or who have attained certain educational levels.

While these types of approaches reward efforts that demonstrate a commitment to the agency's ideals, some Forum participants cautioned that they could also have a disparate impact on working-class or low-income candidates who may not have had the ability to attend college or do volunteer work. There may be excellent candidates who have been busy working multiple jobs to support their families, for example. Participants suggested that agencies need to offer a range of opportunities for candidates to demonstrate the character traits and skill sets that fit with the agency's philosophy and priorities.

A new look at traditional measures

In addition to discussing how to identify and measure the character and personality traits of police officer candidates, forum participants also examined the value of some of the traditional measures by which candidates have long been measured. Two areas in particular—educational requirements and physical standards— were explored in some detail.

Educational requirements

Forum participants generally agreed there is value in police officers having attained some level of higher education, but whether that should be a prerequisite for hiring remains a much debated topic. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, just 15 percent of local law enforcement agencies in the United States required their officers to have some level of college in 2013, and only 1 percent required a four-year degree.[3] The large majority of agencies do not require more than a high-school diploma. However, departments serving a population of at least 1 million are more likely to require some college education; 29 percent of those big-city departments required at least a two-year college degree, and another 7 percent required some college education.

Higher education can be especially valuable for those officers who work in diverse, multi-cultural communities. Sean Smoot, a police labor official and task force member, said that the educational value of college comes not only from classroom instruction but also from exposure to new people and diverse ideas and opinions. "Folks who go to college tend to get exposed to other students and professors who come from various backgrounds that they weren't exposed to in the town they grew up in," Smoot said. Tucson, Arizona, Police Chief Chris Magnus noted that while online degree programs are increasingly popular, they do not provide the same level of exposure to new people and ideas that traditional colleges do.

The hiring forum included officials from two agencies that have recently gone in opposite directions when it comes to a college education requirement:

- The Miami Beach (Florida) Police Department recently added a four-year degree requirement for new officers. Major Wayne Jones explained the change this way: "We feel that if we're going to be calling ourselves professionals, we need to have a well-educated group of candidates to choose from." The department has targeted its recruitment efforts at colleges and universities, and has been successful in meeting its numerical hiring goals and attracting high-quality candidates. Major Jones said that to bolster recruiting of female candidates, the department recruits heavily at universities with strong women's athletic programs.

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[3] Brian Reaves, *Local Police Departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, and Practices* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015), NCJ 248677, https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd13ppp.pdf.

- The New Orleans (Louisiana) Police Department (NOPD), on the other hand, in 2015 dropped its requirement that candidates have 60 college credits, and reverted to requiring only a high school diploma. The change was largely an effort to attract a larger and more diverse applicant pool, which has proven successful. Jonathan Wisbey, NOPD Deputy Chief of Staff, reported that after the change was made, the number of applicants increased five-fold, to 1,500 during a two-month period. The department discovered that 25 to 30 percent of the applicants they are currently processing would not have qualified under the previous requirements. Many had at least some college credits, just not the 60 credits required. NOPD also has brought in people with additional life experience and employment history, whose communications and human relations skills may be more developed than a 21-year-old who just graduated from college.

While the NOPD no longer requires two years of college at the time of hiring, the department has sent a clear signal that it values higher education. For example, it offers access to free tuition programs and reimbursements for textbooks and other expenses.

"We firmly agree that higher education is useful in policing and can help produce a better police officer, so we have incentive and support programs available to people once they're on the force to obtain that level of education. It seemed wrong to disqualify candidates who may not have had the financial means or opportunities to go to college. The change was our way of getting additional folks in the door and then helping them get additional education, rather than making it a barrier to even applying."

– Jonathan Wisbey, Deputy Chief of Staff,
New Orleans (Louisiana) Police Department

Physical fitness standards

Requiring officer candidates to demonstrate a level of physical fitness is important to the agency and to the candidate, forum participants agreed. Being a police officer is a physically demanding job, and officers need to be prepared to engage in strenuous and potentially dangerous physical activity. That basic requirement has not changed for the 21st century police officer.

However, forum participants noted that there is little consistency in the physical fitness standards from state to state and from agency to agency. With some exceptions, the basic standards that officer candidates must achieve today have not changed very much, they said. Importantly, forum participants also questioned whether the current standards were an appropriate measure of the tasks that officers really need to be able to do, and whether the standards are biased against certain candidates, especially women.

For example, many states and agencies require candidates to complete a set number of push-ups during a one- or two-minute test. The push-up test is designed to assess upper-body strength and muscular endurance. But as COPS Office Director Ronald L. Davis pointed out, "What you really want to know is, do they have the strength to control somebody who resists? Why not test them on that? Test to see if they can take down a person and handcuff them. If they can do that, then why would I care about push-ups?"

Lenexa (Kansas) Police Major Dawn Layman, who serves as President of the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE), said traditional standards that measure upper-body strength such as push-ups can have a disparate impact on female candidates. Major Layman said there is no comprehensive data on the number of otherwise qualified candidates who drop out of the hiring process because they failed to meet the physical fitness standards; most states and agencies do not collect or report such information. But she said that she and her colleagues at NAWLEE hear anecdotal evidence that physical fitness testing is having a disparate impact on women.

The Madison (Wisconsin) Police Department is working to address the issue of high-quality candidates, including men as well as women, who drop out of the process because they fail to meet physical fitness requirements. The State of Wisconsin requires officer candidates to pass two physical fitness tests, one at the time they are hired and one at the time they complete academy training. Early in the recruiting and hiring process, Madison police do a basic physical screening for each candidate. As potential hires progress through the hiring process, the department's training team provides them with hands-on guidance on how to prepare for the state-mandated entry level test. Madison Police Captain Mary Schauf said this approach is helping the agency maintain its standards and achieve it diversity goals. "We just had a class that started Monday, and it is 43 percent women and 30 percent racially diverse," she reported.

Several forum participants also said that fitness should not be viewed as simply a one-time test that officers need to pass at the beginning of their careers. Rather, agencies should make fitness—physical, emotional, and even "financial fitness"—a priority throughout an officer's career. Some agencies are taking this shift in thinking to heart.

For example, the Lenexa Police Department conducts quarterly fitness tests that all personnel participate in. Officers who don't pass the test are not penalized, but those who do pass receive incentives such as additional days off. Within its nine-hour workday schedule, the department carves out on-duty time for officers to engage in physical fitness activities. The department has also woven financial responsibility and other life skills into its "whole person" approach to employee fitness and life learning.

Finally, forum participants said there should be more research on how to evaluate physical fitness standards for police officers and ensure they are directly related to the tasks that officers must typically complete. Fitness standards should be evidence-based, not simply guided by tradition.

Guarding against Disparate Impact on Women in Police Hiring

The Federal government has taken an increased interest in ensuring that police agency hiring practices are fair and comply with the civil rights requirements of the Safe Streets Act of 1968. Recently, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) within the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, launched a series of compliance reviews of the hiring practices at state law enforcement agencies. One of the areas the OCR has focused on is whether hiring practices have a disparate impact on female applicants.

The OCR's first report, published in January 2016, examined the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) and the Alabama Department of Public Safety (DPS) (in a restructuring, DPS became part of the ALEA in January 2015).[*] One of the areas that investigators focused on was officer selection practices, specifically whether any of the agencies' screening devices had the impact of improperly excluding female applicants from the process. The review concluded that in three years—2009, 2011, and 2014—the DPS "used a pre-offer physical agility and ability test to screen trooper applicants that adversely impacted females and that was neither sufficiently related to the trooper position nor consistent with business necessity."

While there were relatively few female applicants during those years, the OCR found they passed the pre-offer physical test at about half the rate that male applicants did in 2009 and 2011, and no female applicants passed the test in 2014. The ALEA provided the OCR with a study that showed a correlation between the screening devices it used and applicants' ability on a simulated task to "apprehend and subdue an offender." However, the OCR determined that the research design was flawed and inadequate to defend the business necessity of the screening measures.

OCR also pointed out that the department has lower physical standards for troopers already employed with the agency than for applicants, which further demonstrated the lack of business necessity for the more stringent pre-employment test. Participants in the hiring forum emphasized that physical standards in the hiring process should be clearly job-related, and that physical fitness should be a focus not just at the beginning of an officers' careers but throughout their employment.

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Office of Justice Programs, "OCR Issues Report, Finds Alabama Agency Failed to Properly Recruit, Hire and Retain Female Troopers," press release, January 5, 2016, http://ojp.gov/newsroom/pressreleases/2016/ojp01052016.pdf. For the full report, see Office of Civil Rights, "Compliance Review of Ala. Law Enf't Agency and Ala. Dep't of Pub. Safety (14-OCR-0444)," to Spender Collier (Alabama Law Enforcement Agency) and John E. Richardson (Alabama Department of Public Safety), January 4, 2016, http://ojp.gov/about/ocr/pdfs/14-OCR-0444_01042016.pdf.

"When we start establishing physical standards across the board, we need to explicitly ask, how is it job-related? What are the tasks that are required? I know many females who can handle a call and run circles around some of their brothers, but they can't necessarily bench-press 350 pounds. Fitness for officers should be inculcated into the organization to emphasize lifetime fitness as part of a holistic approach to officer well-being—not arbitrary standards or numbers."

— Major Dawn Layman, Lenexa (Kansas) Police Department; President, National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives

Still need to "screen out the negative"

Forum participants said it is important for agencies to use the hiring process proactively—as a way to attract and retain those candidates who share the agency's values and who possess the key character traits and capabilities that the agency is looking for. At the same time, it is essential that agencies use the process to identify and screen out those candidates who do not possess the needed values and character traits, as well as those who are unethical, explicitly biased, or otherwise unfit to serve.

Traditionally, certain behaviors uncovered in the background investigation process have been almost automatic disqualifiers for many agencies: past drug use and financial problems, for example. But as the candidate pool has changed, and as social mores and even some drug laws have evolved over time, agencies have reconsidered some of their traditional thinking about candidates' histories and prior activities. At the same time, agencies have also been forced to re-evaluate some of the tools, such as polygraph exams, voice stress analyzers, and psychological screenings, that they have relied on in the past.

These changes are adding further complications to a hiring process that, in many cases, was already cumbersome to begin with. The hiring forum offered a variety of new perspectives on these issues.

Dealing with past drug use

Of all the hiring issues confronting police agencies today, one of the most complicated and vexing is the issue of past drug use among applicants—in particular, past marijuana use.

Part of the complication stems from the fact that Americans' attitudes toward marijuana have shifted dramatically in recent years. According to a 2015 Gallup Poll, 58 percent of Americans think marijuana use should be legal in the United States, compared to 36 percent in 2005.[4] Eight states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for recreational use, and another 21 states have legalized medical marijuana.[5] Today's police officer candidates are entering the workforce at a time when marijuana use is becoming increasingly normalized, even legalized, in the United States.

Given this changing landscape, some police agencies are confronting the issue of how to address past marijuana use among their officer candidates. The Drug Enforcement Administration continues to classify marijuana as a Schedule I drug, and most agencies strictly prohibit its use by current officers and officer candidates.

The challenge for police agencies is how to effectively screen out candidates whose performance would be impacted by past drug use, without pushing out otherwise strong candidates who may have used marijuana recreationally in the past but whose performance would not be affected.

Traditionally, police agencies have addressed this issue by establishing numeric thresholds on past marijuana use for screening out their officer candidates. The thresholds typically cover either (1) the total number of times that a candidate used marijuana throughout his or her life, (2) how recently they used marijuana, or (3) a combination of the two. For example, in the State of Maryland, police applicants are automatically disqualified if they used marijuana more than 20 times throughout the course of their lives, more than 5 times since turning age 21, or any time in the last three years. Agencies can petition the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commissions (PCTC) for an exemption on an individual candidate, but they cannot obtain a waiver of the entire rule.

Recently, Baltimore Police Commissioner Kevin Davis approached the PCTC about relaxing the current standards. The commissioner has said that past marijuana use is the number one disqualifier of police applicants in Baltimore and is undermining efforts to grow and diversify the department. He recommended that the state maintain its prohibition on marijuana use in the past three years, but that the state eliminate the automatic disqualifiers for any marijuana use before then.

Speaking at the forum, Lieutenant Elliott Cohen of the Maryland State Police said his agency, too, supports the focus on the recency of marijuana use, as opposed to lifetime use. "We consider the fact that applicants may have used in the distant past but may have demonstrated a change in their behavior by not having used for a period significantly greater than the statutory time," he said. Jennifer Beskid, Director of Grants and Special Projects at the Maryland PCTC, said another approach her agency is exploring is to establish a cutoff age past which applicants could not have used marijuana.

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[4] Jeffrey Jones, "In U.S., 58% Back Legal Marijuana Use," Gallup Social Science Series, October 21, 2015, http://www.gallup.com/poll/186260/back-legal-marijuana.aspx.

[5] "State Marijuana Laws in 2016 Map," Governing.com, last modified November 11, 2016, http://www.governing.com/gov-data/state-marijuana-laws-map-medical-recreational.html.

> "In discussing drug use, we try to define an age at which you know that you're headed toward a career in law enforcement. At some point, you make a commitment to become a law enforcement officer in the future, and you stop using marijuana."
>
> *– Jennifer Beskid, Director of Grants and Special Projects, Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commissions*

However, Director Oliver of Cedarville University argued that agencies should look at both recency and frequency of marijuana use. Noting that the best indicator of future behavior is past and current performance, he argued that a recency test may indicate if the behavior is still going on. A frequency test would suggest that the person may be unsuitable for a career in policing, in his view.

The impact of marijuana legalization on police hiring was also discussed at the forum. As more states make the recreational or medicinal use of marijuana legal, there is growing interest nationwide on how legalization may affect police hiring practices. Representatives of three jurisdictions where recreational use of marijuana is now legal—the District of Columbia, Colorado, and Seattle—described their experiences thus far.

In Washington, D.C., the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) adjusted its thresholds on marijuana use following legalization in February 2015. Now, police officer candidates may not have used marijuana in the two years prior to the time of application; the previous threshold had been three years. For applicants to the MPD's Police Cadet program, which is an important part of the department's overall recruitment and hiring strategy, the threshold was reduced from three years to one year. MPD Assistant Chief Robert Contee III said that, because of their age and maturity levels, holding 17- or 18-year-old cadet applicants to the same standard as candidates for full-time sworn officer positions did not seem reasonable. Since the change, the MPD has seen more young people entering the cadet program and more people making it through the application process.

In Colorado, which legalized marijuana for recreational purposes in 2012, there has been minimal impact on hiring practices or outcomes, according to Cory Amend, Director of the Colorado POST Board. He indicated that for hiring purposes, police agencies in the state continue to follow federal law regarding marijuana. Most agencies have disqualification thresholds for marijuana use of between one and three years, and those have not changed dramatically since 2012. He further stated that the number of candidates being disqualified for marijuana use remains very low and has not increased.

In Seattle, Washington, legalization of marijuana has not dramatically altered the police department's approach to background investigations and hiring, according Brian Maxey, the Seattle Police Department's Chief Operating Officer. Seattle disqualifies applicants for marijuana use within one year of application, although Mr. Maxey described that as a "maybe disqualifier, not an absolute disqualifier." He acknowledged that Seattle, like many other agencies, has never clearly articulated the

precise reason for making past marijuana use a disqualifier: is it a moral issue, a criminal law issue, a health issue, a predictor of future drug dependency problems? Maxey said that his focus is on the predictive value of past use, which is why he thinks agencies should also be concerned about any history of alcohol abuse by an applicant.

Finally, in addition to marijuana use, some forum participants raised the issue of Adderall, a prescription drug used to treat narcolepsy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). Barbara West, Chief of Support Services for the Chicago Police Department, noted that Adderall use has recently increased in popularity among college students who use the drug without a prescription to remain awake and focused, especially during exam periods. Agencies, especially those that have a higher education requirement for applicants, should monitor this issue and possibly adjust their policies accordingly.

Dealing with bias—explicit and implicit

Another issue explored in the hiring forum was the presence of racial or other bias among applicants and whether bias can be accurately singled out and measured. Forum participants agreed that explicit bias – attitudes and beliefs that exist on a conscious level and that control one's judgment and behavior toward certain people – must be an automatic disqualifier. However, the issue gets more complex when implicit bias becomes part of the equation.

Implicit bias refers to bias in judgment or behavior that results from subtle attitudes and stereotypes that usually exist below the level of conscious awareness and which the individual does not intentionally control.[6] Most social scientists agree that every person harbors various types of implicit bias, so finding officer candidates who are 100 percent bias-free is an unrealistic expectation. Rather, forum participants agreed, the key to effective hiring is to weed out candidates who display explicit bias and work to acknowledge and provide training for implicit bias.

"Everybody has implicit biases. So you have to look at the collective body of information from the hiring process—the integrity tests, the psychological tests, the interview questions—and look at that as a predictor of whether or not the candidate has the ability to perform the job that way we're being asked to by our community."

– Commander David Robinson, Dearborn (Michigan) Police Department

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[6] For additional background on implicit bias and research on the topic, see "Implicit Bias," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/implicit-bias/. For background on the impact of implicit bias on policing, see Lorie Fridell, "Psychological Research Has Changed How We Approach the Issue of Biased Policing," *Subject to Debate: A Newsletter of the Police Executive Research Forum* 28, no. 3 (2014), http://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Subject_to_Debate/Debate2014/debate_2014_mayjun.pdf.

Mark Kirschner of Behavioral Health Consultants said there is no accurate, validated test for measuring bias. He noted that the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) has a tolerance scale that provides one measure of an individual's acceptance of different attitudes and viewpoints. However, neither the CPI nor other commonly used psychological tests provide a definitive measure of bias that police agencies can rely on.

Forum participants said that background investigators need to look to other sources of information that may uncover bias. For example, a candidate's biases often emerge through their social media posts, and many agencies are taking a closer look at applicants' Facebook, Twitter, and other social media accounts for signs of explicit bias or other conduct that might call into question their suitability to be a police officer.

Other participants noted that the search for biased attitudes and behavior should not stop at the initial hiring process. David Rodgers, CEO of Tribal Public Safety Innovations, said all agencies should closely monitor the field training and probationary periods for any signs of bias among new officers. Sean Smoot of the Illinois Police Benevolent and Protective Association said there should be specific criteria or metrics that field training officers should use in evaluating bias among their trainees.

While explicit bias can sometimes be relatively easy to detect through social media, interview questions, and the candidate's own behavior, measuring implicit bias is far less clear-cut. In Morrisville, North Carolina, police try to gauge whether candidates have even considered the issue of bias in their own lives or in policing in general. Chief Patrice Andrews said, "One of those questions that I ask candidates is, 'What are your biases?' And that throws many of them off. I've had some candidates say that they don't have any bias at all. And then I'll ask them very simply, 'What are your thoughts on 21st century policing, bias, and the role of the police with the community?'"

However, acknowledging their implicit bias can put candidates in a difficult position if an investigator were simply to note "admitted to bias" on a background report. That's why forum participants emphasized that when considering possible bias among candidates, agencies need to take a deeper look than simply checking off a box on a form. "You have to understand the whole person, and you have to ask the right questions to determine that," said Assistant Chief Michael Grinstead of the Newport News (Virginia) Police Department. "If you do have a bias, what is it and can you deal with it? Is it going to affect your job performance?"

Although all people have implicit biases, these attitudes are not rigid or inflexible. That's why forum participants also stressed the importance of providing training to police officers on how to recognize and manage implicit bias, starting with recruits in the academy.

> "We have to accept the idea that everybody has biases. So don't make implicit bias a part of your screening process; train people to understand it and manage it. When people become police officers, include that in their training. The focus on bias in the screening process ought to be on explicit bias."
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> *– Darrel Stephens, Executive Director, Major Cities Chiefs Association*

Providing context for financial responsibility issues

Until a few years ago, candidates who filed for personal bankruptcy, defaulted on a loan, or had other serious financial problems were often automatically disqualified from the hiring process. At the time, it was thought that personal financial difficulties represented a failure to follow through on one's obligations and even posed a major integrity issue by making candidates susceptible to bribery.

However, following the Great Recession of 2007-09, which was the longest recession since World War II and was considered particularly severe,[7] the number of people in the workforce or entering the workforce with a history of financial problems has grown markedly. Faced with these economic realities, some police agencies have adjusted their thinking on how personal financial problems should affect eligibility for hiring. Rather than treating these types of situations as automatic disqualifiers, agencies are now taking a more detailed look at the underlying issues and their context. Forum participants said that in the new economy, agencies need to be able to distinguish between unfortunate circumstances and grossly negligent or criminal activity when it comes to job applicants' personal finances.

A new look at some traditional tools

Forum participants discussed the efficacy of some of the tools that police agencies have traditionally used to screen candidates. In particular, they examined the role that polygraph examinations and psychological tests should play in the hiring process.

Polygraphs

Among agencies represented at the hiring forum, approximately half said they use a polygraph exam as part of their hiring process. Some states, including Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, prohibit polygraph use in police hiring, while other states such as Arizona and Washington mandate it. Some forum participants expressed concern that use of the polygraph may be inappropriate because

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[7] See Robert Rich, "The Great Recession of 2007–09," *Federal Reserve History,* last modified November 22, 2013, http://www.federalreservehistory.org/Events/DetailView/58.

applicants may be offended by having to go through such a procedure, particularly for a position that increasingly is seen as requiring high-level skills and professionalism. Others defended the polygraph as an effective way to uncover issues with honesty and integrity, two of the key qualities the public demands of its police officers.

Among major cities, Chicago and Los Angeles have adopted the polygraph within past decade. Other agencies, such as Morrisville, North Carolina, have opted for the voice stress analyzer (VSA) as an alternative to the polygraph; some have suggested the VSA has a better track record in detecting dishonesty.

Most agencies that use the polygraph do so in conjunction with a pre-polygraph personal information booklet. It establishes a baseline against which the truthfulness of a candidate's answers can be measured.

 "I've hired and fired people who passed polygraph tests and then went on to be involved in some really dishonest and extremely bad behavior that the test was no accurate indicator for. It's a very small segment of the population, but there are certainly sociopaths who can pass a polygraph with a straight face, and some of them want to be police officers. I hope that we can put behind us the notion that the polygraph is some protective shield for agencies. If we continue to use it, it should be a qualified tool."

– Chris Magnus, Chief of Police, Tucson (Arizona) Police Department

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Although the polygraph continues to be widely used in police hiring, Hiring Forum participants discussed a number of issues and concerns that agencies should consider when using the polygraph. One key issue is the science of the polygraph itself. Noting that polygraphs cannot be used in most criminal court cases, Tucson Police Chief Magnus expressed concern that candidates were being disqualified on the basis of science that has not been well defended or universally accepted.

Other participants questioned whether the ability to pass a polygraph during the hiring process is an accurate predictor of integrity and honesty later on. They pointed to cases such as Christopher Dorner, a former Los Angeles police officer who passed a polygraph exam but killed five people in 2013. Forum participants said that agencies should not be lulled into a false sense that the polygraph immunizes agencies from misconduct or criminal behavior by officers later in their careers.

Another issue discussed at the forum was where to put the polygraph exam in the hiring process. Some agencies have candidates take the polygraph at the beginning of the process. The theory is that identifying and, if necessary, disqualifying an untrustworthy applicant early on will save the agency time and resources on latter stages of the process. Some participants, however, indicated that this approach

can produce unintended consequences. For example, by inserting the polygraph exam at the front of the process, agencies may forego the opportunity to probe matters that come up later in the background investigation among candidates who passed the initial polygraph.

Some forum participants also questioned whether the use of polygraphs, in conjunction with lifetime restrictions on past marijuana use, may be keeping otherwise qualified candidates from even considering applying to become police officers. For example, a candidate who may have used marijuana recreationally in the past and, therefore exceeded an agency's lifetime threshold on marijuana use, would face the choice of telling the truth on the polygraph and being disqualified for past marijuana use, or lying and being disqualified on the polygraph exam. Some forum participants suggested that agencies, especially those that use polygraph exams, may need to be more flexible and consider a candidate's entire background, as opposed to simply relying on single disqualifiers such as lifetime marijuana use.

For the most part, forum participants agreed that when the polygraph is employed, it should be used as an investigative tool that highlights issues for additional follow-up by background investigators. In general, participants questioned the use of the polygraph as a sole-source disqualifier.

> "The polygraph holds an important purpose for us in determining honesty and integrity. Members of the public want to have public service workers who are honest throughout their careers and especially in the initial hiring process. If an applicant is deceitful during the hiring phase, then how could we be confident in their ability to testify in court, write their reports, and generally be trusted by the public?"
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> *– Lieutenant Eliott Cohen, Maryland State Police*

Psychological tests

Forum participants also discussed the role of psychological exams in the police hiring process. Experts at the forum emphasized the importance of ensuring that exams are standardized, validated, and normed for the particular population being tested (in this case, police officer candidates). Dr. Evan Axelrod, Director of Psychological Preemployment Evaluations at Nicoletti-Flater Associates, said that in recent years a growing body of research on tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the California Psychological Inventory is helping to ensure the tests are empirically based and validated specifically for police and other public safety personnel.

Dr. Axelrod said the bigger concern is ensuring that psychologists who conduct tests for police agencies are adequately trained and qualified. He said there are psychologists who "hang up a shingle and say they can do psychological testing," but often those psychologists are not specifically trained in police and public safety psychology. He urged agencies to scrutinize their psychologists carefully and ensure that they have the appropriate skills and training.

> "It's not just the tests themselves that have to be validated. It's also the practitioners who are using those tools and who are trained to use those tools."
>
> *– Dr. Evan Axelrod, Director of Psychological Preemployment Evaluations, Nicoletti-Flater Associates*

Reviewing candidates from other agencies

For agencies that hire experienced officers who previously worked in other departments, there is a special concern: ensuring that the officer did not leave the first agency under allegations or findings of misconduct. The situation is not uncommon. An officer facing misconduct charges in one agency may be allowed to resign, and the investigation closed. This arrangement enables the officer to maintain state certification as he or she begins looking for other positions. Agencies that are eager to hire experienced, trained, and certified officers—and thus avoid the time and expense of conducting a complete background investigation and providing a full training program—may hire the officer, not knowing about the investigation or misconduct. In parts of St. Louis County, Missouri, for example, the practice is common enough that it has earned its own name: the "muni shuffle."[8]

To combat this problem, forum participants emphasized that agencies need to thoroughly vet *all* candidates, including licensed or certified officers who come from other agencies. This means doing more than relying on a phone call to the original agency to verify employment dates and other basic information. Instead, agencies should conduct a thorough follow-up investigation with the original agency to include, whenever possible, a site visit, a review of documentation, and face-to-face meetings with personnel who are knowledgeable about the candidate's work history.

Access to the candidate's personnel files should not be an issue; in most instances, candidates who have an application pending sign a waiver that allows the employing agency to access the applicant's personnel files. The problem, according to many forum participants, is that agencies don't take the time to avail themselves of those records.

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[8] *Overcoming the Challenges and Creating a Regional Approach to Policing in St. Louis City and County* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2015), http://www.policeforum.org/assets/stlouis.pdf.

However, forum participants noted that there are cases in which the original agency destroys the records of its investigation or refuses to disclose the investigation to another agency. In some cases involving employment disputes, the agency may be prohibited under terms of a legal settlement from discussing any investigation it may have conducted.

To address these issues, the State of Illinois maintains a registry that includes the names of officers who were terminated for misconduct or who resigned while under investigation. The list is maintained by the state's POST agency, the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board, and is available to law enforcement agencies throughout Illinois. The list does not provide details about individual cases, but it does alert hiring agencies to individuals who may warrant a more thorough investigation.

Even when officers have been terminated from one agency, it is not always easy for another agency to access information about the termination. In Missouri, agencies are supposed to report all terminations to the state POST board. But experience shows that not every agency complies with the requirement, and some do not share personnel records with other agencies that are considering hiring the individual. In these cases, according to Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Bader of the St. Louis County Police Department, the department initiates a new, complete background investigation of its own, as if the candidate had never previously been certified.

To help combat the problem on a national level, the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST) developed the National Decertification Index (NDI).[9] The NDI serves as a national registry of administrative actions by the nation's POST agencies related to officer misconduct. Original grant funding for the development and the operation of the NDI was provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. Currently, IADLEST funds the NDI from its own limited resources as a service for the law enforcement profession.

While the NDI provides a valuable resource for agencies looking to hire experienced officers from other agencies, especially from other states, the system does have some shortcomings:

- Only 40 states currently contribute to the NDI, and because the system is voluntary, there is no mechanism to compel the others to join. In Virginia, for example, police chiefs often support the NDI, but city attorneys and human resources personnel have resisted, largely because Virginia already has a state-level decertification system, according to Deputy Chief Patrick Gallagher of the Virginia Beach Police Department.

- The minimum standard criterion for reporting an action against an officer to the NDI is revocation. Each state POST board determines independently what will be reported and how access to its records will be granted. Agencies can report more than the minimum standard.

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[9] For more information, see "National Decertification Index – FAQ," IADLEST, accessed December 22, 2016, https://www.iadlest.org/Portals/0/Files/NDI/FAQ/ndi_faq.html.

Consequently, the information can vary from only instances in which an officer's license or certificate was actually revoked to instances in which officers resigned while under investigation or received lesser disciplinary sanctions and maintained their license or certificate.

- The NDI is not widely known or used. In a show of hands at the forum, only a small percentage of agencies indicated that they regularly used the NDI.

Brian Grisham, Director of the Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Academy and President of IADLEST, noted that the task force recommended that the NDI be expanded to include coverage in all states and territories, and that reporting be more standardized nationally.[10] COPS Office Director Davis stressed that IADLEST, not the federal government, operates and maintains the NDI. The NDI must continue to be a "profession-wide database in which we can help 18,000 agencies make informed decisions when they're hiring and hold the profession accountable," Davis said.

Ensuring the process is fair

Ensuring that agencies have access to the range of information they need to make informed hiring decisions is critical. But as some forum participants stressed, it is also important to ensure that the processes by which individual officers end up on registries such as the NDI are fair and unbiased.

Patrick Callahan, public information officer for the Transgender Community of Police and Sheriffs, said this issue is especially important to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. He cited examples of LGBT officers who had never disclosed their orientation or gender identify and were subsequently outed. In some communities, especially in the 27 states that do not have workplace protections for LGBT individuals, these officers can be disciplined, put on the Brady list, and potentially discharged.[11]

Sean Smoot of the Illinois Police Benevolent and Protective Association said that while many police agencies are emphasizing the concept of "procedural justice" in their interactions with the community, they also need to practice "internal procedural justice" with their employees. That means treating officers in a fair, just, and transparent manner, especially during any disciplinary matters.

Tim Richardson, Senior Legislative Liaison for the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), said labor organizations such as the FOP regularly receive reports of officers who feel they are retaliated against for a variety of personal or political reasons. Some are disciplined or terminated, while others simply walk away, hoping to find a job in another agency. He emphasized the importance of providing officers

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[10] President's Task Force, *Final Report*, 29 (see note 1).

[11] "Brady" refers to the landmark 1963 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brady* v. *Maryland* that requires prosecutors to disclose evidence or information that might support the innocence of the defendant or that might help the defense challenge the credibility of government witnesses. Police officers who have been involved in disciplinary matters may be placed on a "Brady list" of officers, meaning they generally cannot testify at criminal trials because of credibility issues in their backgrounds. Being on a "Brady list" can severely undermine the ability of an officer to obtain employment in another agency.

with their due-process rights during internal investigations. He also said it would be a mistake for management to rely on a single list or registry, as opposed to a thorough background investigation with multiple data points, when making hiring decisions about an experienced officer who worked in another agency.

Forum participants said that agencies need to be especially careful when considering candidates who did not successfully complete the field training officer (FTO) program in another agency. Some officers are rejected from FTO programs because of misconduct or gross negligence. In other cases, however, the FTO program itself may have been substandard, or the officer simply was not a good fit with the hiring agency. In these cases, "failure" to pass the FTO program should not be held against an applicant in the same way that misconduct would be. Said Mr. Smoot, "I have seen situations where officers didn't make it through one department's FTO program, went to another department, and had illustrious careers there."

> "What we're talking about are agencies that can put an [LGBT] officer on a list for a Brady violation and essentially make them ineligible to work anywhere else in their careers, when they have literally done nothing wrong except finally be who they are."
>
> *– Patrick Callahan, Public Information Officer,*
> *Transgender Community of Police and Sheriffs*

Retaining the Officers You Hire

Recruiting and hiring well-qualified police officer candidates is a time- and resource-intensive process for most agencies. And as several hiring forum participants noted, the challenges don't stop once an officer is hired. Retaining high-quality officers has to be a priority, not just to grow and develop an agency, but also to avoid the costs and waste of time in having to repeat the process of filling the vacancies when officers leave.

Michael Ferrence Jr., Executive Director of the Major County Sheriffs' Association, said that the retention issue will become more urgent as more Millennials and now members of Generation Z enter the workforce. Anecdotally, it appears these individuals are less likely than members of older generations to stay with one organization, or even one profession, throughout their careers.

Retaining the Officers You Hire (cont'd)

"So while we're looking at what we're bringing in on the front end, we've got to figure out how to deal with those issues that cause people to leave prematurely without running through an entire career—things like supervision, incentives, working conditions, and policies. If we don't address those issues, we'll get new officers and retain them for three to five years, and then they'll be gone," he said.

Of particular concern to some agencies is the practice of a candidate being recruited, screened, hired, and trained by one department, only to move to another agency a short time later. Mark Kirschner of Behavioral Health Consultants, which conducts psychological screenings of public safety personnel, said the State of Connecticut used to have a minimum service requirement that officers stay with an agency for at least two years after academy graduation or be forced to repay some of the costs associated with their hiring and training. When Connecticut did away with that requirement, he said, some agencies effectively halted their traditional recruiting efforts and focused instead on attracting recently hired officers from other agencies.

"They're sending scouts to the state academy and cherry-picking people who've already been vetted, already gone through the background. People are literally switching patches in the academy from the department they were hired by and are working for," Mr. Kirschner said.

Other jurisdictions are facing the same problem. Deputy Chief Travis Glampe of the Minneapolis (Minnesota) Police Department said "cherry-picking" is happening in his agency as well: "A lot of the small agencies are telling their applicants, 'Wait until Minneapolis gets your background done, and then bring it to us.' And by state law, we have to provide it to them. So we're doing all the work for some of these agencies and getting cherry-picked on a four-month background investigation."

Some states, such as California, are trying to curtail this practice by requiring every agency to conduct its own background investigation on any new hire, even if another agency has recently conducted a background investigation on the same individual.

While the issue of officer retention was not examined in depth at the forum, participants agreed that agencies need to focus not only on getting the right people in the door, but also on keeping them there. Otherwise, agencies will spend time, money, and other resources on a process that does not benefit them.

Recommendations and promising practices: Hiring candidates who share the values and vision of the community and the department

(Agencies listed in parentheses have implemented the promising practice that is identified.)

- Agencies should use the hiring process not just as a way to disqualify candidates who fail to meet certain minimum standards; agencies should also use the process to proactively identify and bring on board candidates who possess the values, character traits, and capabilities that agencies are seeking.

- Agencies should consult with the community when identifying the desired traits, characteristics, and capabilities they are seeking in their newly hired officers.

- To better measure and evaluate the full range of candidates' characteristics and capabilities, agencies should invest in face-to-face interviews that include scenario-based questions *(Dallas Police Department).* Agencies should also consider having candidates go on ride-alongs with officers and involve them in community engagement activities *(Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety).*

- Whether or not agencies have a higher education requirement at the time of hire, they should offer tuition reimbursement and other programs that encourage officers to continue their educations once they are on the force *(New Orleans Police Department).*

- States and individual agencies should adopt physical fitness standards that are job-related and research- and evidence-based. Agencies should also embrace physical fitness as a priority throughout officers' careers, and not simply a one-time test they need to pass in order to be hired *(Lenexa Police Department).*

- While policies and thresholds on past marijuana use vary by agency and may be affected by state and local factors, including laws on marijuana use, the focus should be on candidates' recent use, as opposed to lifetime use, as a predictor of future problems with substance abuse.

- Agencies should check candidates' social media accounts for any indicators or warning signs of explicit bias *(Baltimore Police Department).*

- If a polygraph exam is used, it should be treated as an investigative tool for identifying issues for additional follow-up by background investigators.

- Agencies should ensure that psychologists who conduct examinations of applicants are trained and qualified in the specialty area of public safety psychology.

- When considering hiring experienced personnel who previously worked in another department, the hiring agency should conduct a thorough investigation that includes, whenever possible, a site visit, a review of documentation, and face-to-face meetings with personnel knowledgeable about the candidate's work history, as well as checks of the National Decertification Index and any state-level registries. To support this process, state POST Boards should maintain registries of officers who resigned while under investigation or who were terminated for misconduct *(State of Illinois, Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board).*

- As recommended by the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, all states and territories should participate in the National Decertification Index, and there should be national, standardized reporting practices that support the hiring needs of local and state agencies.

2. Making the Hiring Process More Efficient

> "When we talk about the 'time to hire,' we have to remember that this is the generation of instant gratification. If the recruitment and hiring process doesn't happen fast enough, we lose that entire group."
>
> *– Jennifer Beskid, Director of Grants and Special Projects, Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commissions*

There was broad agreement among participants at the Hiring Forum that the process for hiring police officers in the United States is often plagued by inefficiency and a lack of urgency. Compared with most other professions, the police hiring process is slow, cumbersome, overly bureaucratic, and not very user-friendly for the applicant. In some jurisdictions, it can be a year or more from the time an individual submits an application to when a successful candidate begins police academy training.

For decades, police agencies have used largely the same process, and there has been little incentive to change, because traditionally, there were more applicants than there were vacant officer positions. Many of the people entering the policing profession came from families of officers who went through the same process themselves, so there was little expectation that things would be done any differently. Agencies were able to fill their ranks using protocols that had served them well for years.

Recently, however, those dynamics have shifted dramatically. Police officer vacancies have risen, with some large departments suddenly looking to fill several hundred positions. At the same time, the candidate pool has diversified beyond the core group of applicants who joined the profession over generations. Fewer candidates are coming from traditional "police families." More are coming with college degrees that provide them with greater flexibility to consider other careers, especially if those professions can complete the hiring process more efficiently and get recent graduates on the payroll more quickly.

Perhaps the biggest change has been generational. Candidates entering the workforce today are largely Millennials and, now, members of Generation Z as well. These individuals grew up with technology that allows them to obtain information on almost any subject in seconds, or to purchase goods and obtain

them overnight, rather than waiting days or weeks for delivery. Participants at the hiring forum said that these younger generations can be impatient, making them less likely to tolerate a police hiring process that can last months, is largely paper-driven, and can be frustratingly opaque to the applicant.[12]

In addition, police agencies are no longer competing just with other professions. As police vacancies have increased and the applicant pool has shifted, agencies are now competing more fiercely with one another for the top candidates. Becoming more efficient and more user-friendly can provide agencies with a competitive advantage. All these factors give agencies a strong incentive to improve.

Forum participants explored the current state of police hiring and how agencies are working to make their processes faster, more nimble, and more user-friendly to better match these new realities. At the same time they are trying to reduce the time to hire, agencies are also looking for ways to improve the quality and thoroughness of their background investigations.

As some of the participants at the forum demonstrated, agencies can speed up the process and improve quality at the same time.

Different processes, different timelines

Almost any objective observer would conclude that the process to hire police officers takes far too long in most agencies. Participants at the hiring forum were asked how long the hiring process takes in their agencies, from date of application until the first day in the training academy. Their responses ranged from five weeks (in Morrisville, North Carolina) to 12 months (in Chicago). For federal agencies, the process can be even more daunting and lengthy. Catherine Sanz, Executive Director of Women in Federal Law Enforcement, said that when she worked for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the hiring process took 18 months or longer from the establishment of a list. And once agents were hired, there could be a further delay while the agency waited for training slots to become available at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Georgia or the loss of funding due to lack of appropriations and continuing resolutions.

In addition, many larger agencies offer an entry-level written exam to thousands of applicants at one time. Those who pass the exam are put on a list that can be kept open for up to three years. So an applicant can be on the list for several months, or even a year or two, before the hiring process (that is, the background investigation) officially begins.

Not surprisingly, smaller agencies have the flexibility (and the relatively small numbers of applicants) to be able to complete the process much more quickly than larger agencies. Most mid- to large-size agencies reported that the process took between 6 and 9 months.

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[12] For example, research has shown that Millennials, more so than older generations, overwhelmingly prefer a technology-based, mobile job search process. "Three Generations of Talent: Who's Searching for Jobs Today," Indeed Hiring Lab, last modified December 1, 2014, http://www.indeed.com/hire/hiring-lab/Dec-2014.

There are a number of factors that can affect the length of the hiring process and why it can vary so dramatically from agency to agency and from state to state. These include some issues that are largely outside the control of individual agencies, such as state POST standards and state and local civil service systems.

Patricia Marsolais said she has seen first-hand in two states how state requirements can constrain and slow down the hiring process. As city personnel director in Albany, New York, she saw how hiring was controlled tightly by the New York State Civil Service System. Now, as Director of Dallas Civil Service, she has seen how a Texas state regulation known as Rule 143, which spells out civil service provisions for police officers and firefighters, can slow down hiring of officers. However, because Dallas is a "home-rule city" that is *not* governed by Rule 143, "we have much more flexibility in how we hire and the process we use to do so," she said.

Some of the labor representatives at the forum pointed out that what some people view as "obstacles" in the hiring process are actually reforms that were enacted to combat egregiously unjust hiring practices, not just in policing but in all of public service. For example, many civil service application and testing protocols were created to promote fairness and objectivity in the hiring process and to guard against political influence. The labor representatives cautioned against rolling back these types of protections in the interest of speeding up the hiring process.

Differences in state laws can also affect both the length and the thoroughness of the background investigation process. Sean Smoot of the Police Benevolent and Protective Association of Illinois noted that in Illinois, as in most states, there is no legal requirement that hiring agencies conduct a criminal background check or a psychological evaluation. Agencies that choose to take these steps are necessarily slowing down the process for their applicants, and perhaps putting their agencies at a competitive disadvantage to quickly hire a new officer. But these steps are also helping to ensure that officers with questionable backgrounds are kept out of the profession. Mr. Smoot said that labor leaders in Illinois have pushed for a minimum standard for police background checks that would raise the overall quality of pre-hire investigations and help to level the playing field in terms of the length of time it takes to hire an officer.

Finally, some departments, including large agencies such as the Los Angeles Police Department, do not have independent hiring authority. Rather, they must rely on a municipal personnel department to set and oversee the process.

Procedural inefficiencies

Some delays are locked into hiring processes. For example, many agencies have a rigid schedule of steps that applicants must complete in a prescribed sequence. There is little or no flexibility to conduct steps out of order or complete multiple steps at a time. Often, applicants are required to visit multiple locations within the police or municipal bureaucracy to conduct multiple steps in the process, or to pick up or drop off different forms—almost all of them paper-based. (In Maryland, state law requires that

paperwork associated with police hiring be sent through the United States Postal Service.) Assembling all of that information and making sure it gets passed along to the appropriate people—that is, the "next step" in the process—can dramatically slow down the system as well.

Hiring forum participants, including the police psychologists, brought up other procedural inefficiencies that not only slow down the hiring process, but also can impact the thoroughness of background investigations:

- Psychological evaluations typically come toward the end of the process, but police psychologists often do not have access to the information collected earlier on, including the background investigation and the polygraph. As a result, the psychologist cannot always tell if the applicant is being truthful or if there may be other integrity issues.

- Inconsistencies in how background investigations are conducted within a department can hamper efficiency and affect outcomes. Police psychologists at the forum reported that especially within large agencies, there are multiple people, often with different backgrounds (internal affairs, street detectives, etc.), conducting background investigations. Investigators do not always ask the same questions of every candidate, and some of their investigative reports go beyond the facts that were collected and instead venture into opinions of the candidates.

- Some agencies may be reluctant to eliminate candidates at earlier stages in the process, before they reach the psychological evaluation, even when there are clear indicators that an applicant is unqualified. This not only prolongs the process for these candidates, but also puts police psychologists in the position of having an outsized influence on whether a candidate is hired. Psychologists at the forum reported instances in which a candidate passed the psychological exam, only to have the department come back and insist that the person be disqualified because of items uncovered in the background. "I can't disqualify people purely because of background issues. That's what the background investigation is for," said Mark Kirschner, Membership Chair of the Police Psychological Services Section of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

> "In an ideal world, I would have the background investigation materials and the polygraph results in front of me when I'm doing the psychological evaluation. It allows me to see what's been said. I've had people who have gotten through the background investigation, they've gotten through the polygraph, and they've gotten through me, but they've told three different stories. So technically they pass each section, but there was a major integrity issue. Somebody needs to be putting it altogether."
>
> *– Dr. Mark Kirschner, Membership Chair,*
> *IACP Police Psychological Services Section*

Promising approaches to accelerate the hiring process

The hiring forum also revealed a number of promising approaches that agencies are taking to speed up the hiring process and make it more efficient and user-friendly. In many cases, these changes are also enhancing the overall quality of the investigative process.

More frequent and regular testing

Some agencies reported that instead of offering one entry-level test to a large number of applicants at the same time, they are now testing small numbers of applicants on a more frequent and regular basis. The Lenexa Police Department offers written and physical tests every month. While the monthly tests sometimes attract only 20 applicants, the schedule keeps a steady flow of potential new hires in the pipeline, without overwhelming the process with large number of applications coming in at once. The Los Angeles Police Department is also offering monthly entry tests, attracting between 600 and 800 applicants a month.

Tighter, more flexible sequencing of hiring components

 Agencies are also becoming more flexible and creative in how they schedule candidates for the different component parts that make up their hiring process. In Los Angeles, the police department, working with the city personnel office, recently enacted changes that allow applicants to schedule multiple components concurrently and in no fixed order. As a result, candidates can schedule their physical exam, polygraph, and oral interview at or about the same time. Also, if there are highly attractive candidates who appear to be wavering, the city can move them to the front of the line to speed up the process. The Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C., has also streamlined its process, allowing candidates to complete several steps at once and in the same location. Lenexa still has applicants follow a set order of exams, but tightly sequences them so that candidates are moving from one phase to the next within a matter of days, not weeks.

More background investigators

Because background investigations are often a choke-point in the hiring process, several agencies are increasing the number of background investigators on staff. And they are being creative in how they are ramping up this critical function quickly and efficiently. The Miami Beach Police Department doubled the size of its background investigation unit by hiring retired officers to work on a part-time basis. The Los Angeles Police Department has taken up to 20 officers from field duty and detailed them to the city personnel office to assist with background investigations. As a result, the background investigation process has been reduced from 12 months to 6-9 months.

Continuous hiring

Agencies are also exploring a continuous approach to hiring. Rather than waiting for a full class of recruits to form before making offers to individual candidates, agencies are making offers and even hiring highly qualified candidates in a civilian capacity. In New Orleans, applicants who pass the initial criminal background screening are offered a temporary civilian job within the department. This approach not only gets highly qualified candidates into the department (thus reducing the chances they will go to another agency), but also allows New Orleans police to observe and evaluate the candidate's work habits and performance as the background process is completed.

The Los Angeles Police Department makes an offer to qualified candidates before the next full academy class is formed, as a way to place a "hold" on the candidates and let them know that they will be hired soon. Smaller agencies, including many sheriffs' departments, are able to hire on a rolling basis, meaning, for example, that if three officers or deputies leave, the agency can hire three candidates in a civilian capacity until the next three slots open in the state or regional Police Academy.

Technology-based solutions

Agencies are looking to streamline the entire hiring process by reducing paper forms and automating the process as much as possible. The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department has instituted a paperless system that ensures all staff involved in the hiring process have access to the latest information about an applicant. The new technology, combined with a streamlining of the steps in the process, has reduced the overall time-to-hire from 12–18 months to just 3–4 months. (See the sidebar "How the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department Dramatically Reduced the Time to Hire Police Officers" on page 38.)

Recognizing that many applicants—in particular Millennials and members of Generation Z—expect and value assistance during the hiring process, some agencies have initiated or expanded their "help lines." The Los Angeles Police Department implemented a mentor program that makes staff members available to answer questions and guide candidates through the application process. The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department offers online "live chats" with recruiters to assist applicants throughout the recruiting and hiring process.

> "The hiring process should not stop once a person is hired. Probably the least-used tool by many agencies is the probationary period. That's the time when you actually start to see behaviors in the field. In many cases, that's the last opportunity for law enforcement executives to remove someone from service without getting into the whole process of civil service and discipline."
>
> *– Ronald L. Davis, Director, COPS Office*

> "It all comes down to a thorough background investigation. As much as we want to produce numbers with a quick test or a polygraph, it comes down to the commitment for more consistent, deep background investigations so that the hiring authority can make an informed decision. I don't know why any agency would want to give less attention to the background component that is arguably the most important piece in the overall hiring process."
>
> *– Nathan Gove, Executive Director,*
> *Minnesota Board of Peace Officer Standards and Training*

Other strategies to promote efficiency and quality

In considering ways to bolster efficiency and quality in the hiring process, hiring forum participants raised several additional issues for agencies to consider:

- **Don't cut corners to hire large numbers of officers quickly**

  With many agencies looking to fill a large number of officer vacancies—and with public and political pressure to put more officers on the street—there may be a temptation for agencies to cut corners in the hiring process. However, history shows that skipping steps in the process may yield short-term gains in terms of numbers, but it can carry long-term consequences that undermine an agency's credibility.

  In 1989 and 1990, the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department hired hundreds of officers while skipping or cutting short key steps in the hiring process. "There was no polygraph in place at the time. There was no psychological screening that took place. Basically, if you wanted a job at that time, the process was so loose and the requirements were so loose that a lot of people came in that caused us problems," said MPD Assistant Chief Robert Contee III, who himself joined the department as a cadet in 1989.

  A 1994 analysis by the Washington Post revealed that more than half of the 201 MPD officers arrested on criminal charges since 1989 were hired in those two years, as were more than half of the officers involved in departmental disciplinary proceedings.[13] The fallout from the hiring spree was felt for years. The department had to invest considerable resources in investigating problem officers, backfilling the responsibilities of many of the officers the department had rushed to hire, and upgrading its recruiting, hiring, and training systems.

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[13] Keith A. Harriston and Mary Pat Flaherty, "D.C. Police Paying for Hiring Binge," *Washington Post*, August 28, 1994, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/longterm/library/dc/dcpolice/94series/trainingday1.htm.

- **Include civilian hiring in your strategies**

  Professor Susan Hilal of Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota, said that police agencies should devote resources and attention on the civilian hiring process, because some agencies have had success hiring some of their sworn officers from among their civilian ranks. She noted, "If we're going to use civilians as a recruitment ground, then we should take a look at how we are going to recruit people to work in a civilian role in policing. What would be the transferability, and how do we vet that process?"

  In addition, to get more officers on the street, rather than having officers do work that can be done by civilians, agencies are looking to hire and retain qualified civilian personnel in technology, communications, forensics, and other areas that do not require the academy training or experience of a sworn officer. A thorough hiring process for civilians can ease pressure on sworn hiring and support the overall goals of the agency.[14]

- **Pay attention to academy and field training periods**

  Several forum participants noted that the hiring process does not stop once a candidate enters the training academy. Agencies need to closely monitor performance, attitudes, and capabilities during both academy and field training, as well as the entire probationary period.

  To give themselves more time and experiences for evaluating new officers, some agencies are increasing the length of their probationary period. Several years ago, for example, the Lenexa Police Department extended its probationary period for new hires to 18 months and for lateral hires to 12 months.

Recommendations and promising practices: Making the hiring process more efficient

(Agencies listed in parentheses have implemented the promising practice that is identified.)

- Agencies should consider offering entry-level testing on a regular and frequent basis, in order to ensure a steady, manageable flow of candidates in the applicant pipeline *(Lenexa Police Department; Los Angeles Police Department)*.

- Rather than follow a rigid schedule of exams, agencies should consider more streamlined and flexible scheduling of the different component parts of their hiring process. These approaches have the potential to save time and resources *(Los Angeles Police Department; Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C.)*.

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[14] For additional background on this issue, see Police Executive Research Forum, *Civilian Staff in Policing: An Assessment of the 2009 Byrne Civilian Hiring Program* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2013), https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/246952.pdf; Police Executive Research Forum, *Labor-Management Relations in Policing: Looking to the Future and Finding Common Ground* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2011), http://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Critical_Issues_Series/labor-management%20relations%20in%20policing%20-%20looking%20to%20the%20future%20and%20finding%20common%20ground%202011.pdf.

- When conducting psychological evaluations, police psychologists should have access to information collected earlier in the process, including the background investigation and any polygraph or voice stress analyzer results. Having this information helps the psychologists better identify possible integrity issues.

- Agencies should strive for consistency in how they conduct background investigations and write reports. Investigators (who may come from different bureaus within the department) should receive consistent training, ask the same basic questions, and refrain from offering opinions or observations about candidates that are not fact-based.

- To speed up the process and ensure that complete and up-to-date information is available to hiring staff members at each step it the process, agencies should look to implement automated systems for managing their hiring process *(Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C.).*

- As a way to demonstrate interest and keep quality candidates on track, agencies should offer "help lines" and other forms of direct service to applicants throughout the hiring process *(Los Angeles Police Department; Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C.).*

- In order to attract and keep high-quality applicants, agencies should consider "continuous hiring" programs in which candidates can be hired in a civilian capacity while the department waits for full academy classes to form or slots to open in state or regional academies *(New Orleans Police Department).*

- To ease pressure on the sworn hiring process and support the overall goals of the agency, departments should devote attention and resources to hiring qualified civilian employees for skilled positions that may be currently filled by sworn officers.

"I commend D.C. because you worked on two of the biggest criticisms I hear from applicants. Number one is that the process is too long. Number two is that there's nobody to talk to about where they stand in the process. When you make people wait too long, the best people move on, because you have their lives on hold the whole time they're in the process. They get very frustrated. If you say that people are your most important resource, but you can't plan and organize this most important function, you have inadvertently told potential applicants something about how your agency values people."

– Dr. Patrick Oliver, Director of Criminal Justice Program, Cedarville University and retired police chief

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**How the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department
Dramatically Reduced the Time to Hire Police Officers**

One of the more remarkable case studies to emerge from the hiring forum was the success of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) of Washington, D.C. in making its hiring process dramatically faster and more efficient, while also improving its quality. Through a combination of streamlined processes and new technology, the MPD has reduced the time needed to hire a new officer from 12–18 months in the past to just 3–4 months today—and this for a large agency hiring 300 or more officers per year. The MPD has achieved these efficiencies and quality improvements without having to hire additional background investigators or other human resources staff.

Assistant Chief Robert Contee III and Ben Haiman, Chief of Staff for the Technical Services Division, outlined the keys to MPD's success:

Streamline steps in the process

In 2012, the MPD conducted a comprehensive review and evaluation of its hiring process. The major finding: the process was rigidly linear, requiring each step in the process to be completed before the next step could begin. This bogged down the process from the start. For example, it took as long as several months for applicants to submit their applications, pass the written examination, and be assigned to a background investigator. As applicants progressed through the process, they had to complete one step at time, often at different MPD facilities with different logistical requirements.

To speed the process, the MPD combined many of these steps. For example, the written examination, physical ability test, preliminary background screening, fingerprinting, and photograph can now be completed in a single "mass processing" event. "This has assisted us greatly with speeding up our hiring process and improving the applicant experience," said Mr. Haiman. Additionally, after a conditional offer of employment has been made, candidates are scheduled for polygraph tests, medical and psychological exams, and background investigations simultaneously. Due to scheduling needs, most candidates still go through the process in the same order; however, lead time for appointments has been dramatically reduced.

Automate the process

To support these operational changes, the MPD acquired new technology to automate the process. Under the old system, applicants typically had to submit paperwork at each step in the process, and that paper file would "follow" the applicant throughout

the process. That meant that MPD staff at each step in the process would have to wait until the paperwork from the previous step was delivered to them before scheduling and processing the candidate. Then, once that step was completed, the employee would attach the new paperwork to the file and send it along to the staff members overseeing the next step. This paper-based system not only slowed down the process; it also increased the chances of paperwork getting misplaced.

In its place, the MPD acquired an automated system that places all forms and information about each candidate in a secure, computerized system. Employees and units are granted access to the information they need, and it is available as soon as new information is entered. As a result, MPD staff members do not have to wait for paperwork to "catch up with" the applicant. "Previously, we'd be shipping reports from one division to another, which always has a potential for a report not to make it and for critical information to be lost," Assistant Chief Contee said. "With our new process, all information is seamlessly made available to whoever needs it."

Support the applicant

One of the biggest frustrations for MPD applicants was the need to make visits to multiple locations to complete steps in the process. This was inconvenient and time-consuming for the applicant. It also sent the message that the police department was old-fashioned and inefficient, which is not a good message to send to young people who are accustomed to systems that work extremely quickly and easily. It is important to realize that job applicants evaluate potential employers even as they undergo the process of applying for employment. A cumbersome application process can cause applicants to question whether the job they are applying for might prove to be a frustrating experience, rather than a fulfilling career they can take pride in.

Under the new system, the MPD is able to offer more of a "one-stop shopping" approach. Multiple steps can be completed at the same time and location, making the process more convenient for the applicant and more efficient for the department as well.

Also, in July 2016, the MPD's Recruiting Division implemented a "live chat" option on the department's website. This allows any interested applicant to chat with a member of the Recruiting Division team in near real-time. The software provides MPD staff members with pre-defined content for commonly asked questions to help ensure that messages are consistently communicated to different applicants. "Staff can usually answer an applicant's questions in five minutes or less and direct them to the next step in the process," said Mr. Haiman. "This has been a tremendously beneficial engagement tool and allows staff to be more responsive than traditional email or phone responses."

3. Advancing Diversity and Inclusiveness in the Hiring Process

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> "We expanded our police cadet program in order to get D.C. kids from the community to join our ranks. We want to hire from this core group of young people who are from the community, who recognize the issues, and who can go into some of these communities and really relate to the problems that people are experiencing."
>
> *— Robert Contee III, Assistant Chief, Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C.*

Police agencies are facing renewed pressure to hire and train more officers, and to get them on the beat quickly. Ensuring quality and efficiency in the hiring process is critical to meeting the needs and expectations of the community.

At the same time they are improving efficiency, agencies must work to ensure their hiring systems are advancing the goals of fairness, diversity, and inclusiveness as well. These ideals are especially important as communities grow more diverse, and as relationships between police and residents remain strained in many cities. Residents want their police agencies' demographics to resemble the community's. They also expect their police officers to be able to relate to their community, to understand its strengths and its challenges, and to solve community problems.

Participants at the hiring forum explored ways to advance diversity and inclusiveness within the police hiring process. They also discussed how to ensure that elements of the hiring process itself—in particular, the selection and actions of background investigators—are compatible with an agency's hiring goals and priorities.

"Grow your own"

Much of this discussion at the Hiring Forum centered on the notion of agencies "growing their own" talent. In other words, agencies looking to promote diversity and cultural competency within their ranks should focus on recruiting and developing officers from the communities that the agency serves.

> "'Growing your own' is the most effective method for hiring people, especially minorities, but it is a long-term investment and commitment. Starting with young people who are 12, 13, and 14 years old in pre-cadet or Explorer programs, you want to take people into your organization, coach them, mentor them, train them, support their education, and develop them."
>
> *– Dr. Patrick Oliver, Director of Criminal Justice Program, Cedarville University and retired police chief*

Being *from* a community does not necessarily guarantee that an individual can become an effective police officer *in* that community. And there is nothing to preclude someone who is recruited from outside a community from becoming an effective, community-oriented, culturally competent police officer.

Still, hiring forum participants emphasized the value of "growing your own." Officers who are from the community often will have more insights and perspectives about the community. And hiring from the community strengthens the community by providing opportunities for professional growth among residents, in particular young people. Both of these benefits can strengthen critical bonds of trust between police and residents.

Following are some of the initiatives that agencies have implemented to promote hiring from within their communities.

Police Cadets

Police cadet programs are designed to prepare young people, typically in their late teens and early twenties, to become police officers of the future. Cadets usually work in a paid civilian capacity for the agency, undergo training, and may be eligible to earn college credits or receive tuition reimbursement while in the program.

Police cadets have a long history in many U.S. cities, and cadet programs count among their graduates some top leaders in the profession. Boston Police Commissioner William Evans and former Philadelphia Police Commissioner and Washington, D.C. Police Chief Charles Ramsey, among others, started their policing careers as cadets.

Faced with budget pressures and other priorities, many departments allowed their cadet programs to dwindle in recent decades or discontinued them. In the last few years, however, some agencies have begun refocusing attention and resources on their cadet programs. The forum heard from several agencies that are making cadet programs an important part of their overall hiring strategies, especially for attracting local residents.

In Boston, for example, the police department recently restarted its program with approximately 42 cadets. Cadets, who are ages 18 to 25, are civilian employees who perform administrative tasks in uniform. Boston Police Superintendent Frank Mancini said the program benefits both the cadets and the department. In addition to being employed, the cadets who complete the two-year program in good standing are given preference for entering the police academy. At the same time, the program is advancing the department's goals of hiring more city residents, including more minority residents.

Minneapolis, Minnesota, operates a Community Service Officer program. The police department recruits young people while they are still in high school, with the offer of a part-time civilian job upon graduation, higher education assistance (Community Service Officers must be enrolled in an approved law enforcement program), and the possibility of a promotion to a full-time police officer position. In addition to being able to develop its future officers, the police department also can evaluate potential officers for an extended period of time while they are in the program. Minneapolis Deputy Police Chief Travis Glampe explained it this way: "You get up to two years to see this person as your employee, not just in an academy setting, but working with members of the police department. You don't get that in the normal police officer hiring process, when you're grabbing them cold and relying more on other peoples' recommendations."

In Washington, D.C., the Metropolitan Police Department's cadet program emphasizes both education and civilian work. Cadets, who earn a full-time salary of $30,000 a year, split their time between attending college classes paid for by the department and working in various units throughout the department. (Successful cadets leave the program with an associate's degree to meet the MPD's minimum educational requirement.) One aspect of the cadet program that the MPD emphasizes is mentoring. A sergeant and a police officer (a former cadet who was born, raised, and graduated public high school in Washington, D.C.) are responsible not just for program administration, but also for coaching and mentoring the cadets while they are in the program.

MPD Assistant Chief Robert Contee III remarked, "The mentoring piece with our cadets is huge, because these are kids, and they're still growing up. They make mistakes, and we want to mentor them through that and try to make them better police officers in the long run through education."

The Los Angeles Police Department operates a tiered cadet/reserve program that includes Junior Cadets (ages 11–13), Cadets (ages 14–17), and Reserves (ages 18–21), at which point successful program participants can enter the police academy.

Given their modest size—even major cities such as Boston and Washington, D.C. can currently accommodate only about 30 cadets at a time—police cadet programs will not necessarily help an agency achieve its numerical goals for hiring. One option agencies might consider is to increase the capacity of their cadet programs to bring more home-grown talent into their organizations. Even at current levels, however, cadet programs do help agencies achieve greater diversity in their recruit officer ranks. Over the long term, the programs also help to build greater connections between the police and residents, including the cadets and their families, friends, and neighbors.

High school public safety academies

Some police agencies are also partnering with their local public schools to support specialized public safety academies at the high school level. These academies are often run in conjunction with the police agencies' cadet programs.

For example, Los Angeles offers a special police officer preparation program at one of its magnet high schools. Students graduate in five years with a high school diploma *and* an associate's degree. They feed into the department's reserve program until age 21, when they are eligible to enter the police academy.

Similarly, the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department in 2016 partnered with the Public Safety Academy at the city's only public high school that offers a specialized criminal justice curriculum. Graduates can transition into the MPD's cadet program, where they are automatically enrolled at the University of the District of Columbia Community College.

Collegiate intern programs

Some agencies also operate robust internship programs that bring current college students into their agencies for a semester or over the summer. For example, the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department has up to 50 interns at a time working in a variety of units within the agency. Many of the interns are from D.C.-area colleges and universities and colleges. Department officials report that the internship program has been a fertile recruiting ground for both sworn and civilian positions.

While forum participants generally endorsed these and other recruiting and career development programs, they did offer some caveats. For one thing, only a relatively small number of the 18,000 police departments in the United States have the size and infrastructure to support programs such as police cadets. Individual agencies that don't have the resources to support such programs might consider partnering with nearby agencies for a joint cadet program.

Some participants cautioned that programs such as police cadets must be designed not simply to reinforce the existing culture within the organization. These types of programs are most beneficial when they bring in new energy and different perspectives that reflect the new generation of officers entering the profession.

Watch out for guardians of the existing culture

> "A lot of the recruits that are making it through the background process tend to be reflective of either the background investigators or the command staff. Who you're recruiting is still very reflective of the culture and people in the department."
>
> *– Patrick Callahan, Public Information Officer,*
> *Transgender Community of Police and Sheriffs*

In their efforts to advance diversity within their agencies, leaders should be aware of what some hiring forum participants labeled "culture guardians" within their organizations. In some cases, these "guardians" are the background investigators who play a critical role in evaluating candidates, as well as the field training officers who help shape new recruits' habits and attitudes in the field. Ensuring that the background investigation process is thorough and fair, and that the attitudes and implicit biases of background investigators do not unduly influence the process, were issues discussed at the forum.

Tucson Police Chief Chris Magnus reported that he has witnessed this phenomenon in the agencies he has worked for. He said that background investigations are typically assigned to a core group of people—often field training officers or detectives—who are exclusively entrusted to do this important work.

"I think that many background investigators see themselves as culture keepers in the organization," Magnus said. "When I was in Richmond, California, this became a huge challenge for us. We were doing an amazing amount of community outreach to bring the right people in, but on the other side of the funnel, it seemed like the people that made it through looked a lot like the background investigators."

> "One of the areas we could advance as a profession would be to figure out some background processes that allow us to elicit more useful and fair information about what a candidate's total life experience has been, as opposed to some of the templates that I've seen. The templates might get you a lot of information, but they actually tell you very little about who you're dealing with and whether the person could fit into your organization."
>
> *– Chris Magnus, Chief of Police, Tucson (Arizona) Police Department*

To better understand what was occurring, Chief Magnus started reviewing the investigation reports of candidates who were disqualified. He found that many of the reports contained similar observations, such as, "the candidate does not appear to bring command presence" or "the candidate does not come across as assertive enough for the job." He interpreted those types of phrases as code words for excluding candidates who might have different backgrounds and demeanors from the person doing the investigation. To guard against this "culture keeper" tendency among background investigators, Chief Magnus said agency leaders should carefully select their background investigators, make sure they understand and are aligned with the hiring goals of the agency, and then closely monitor their work.

Other forum participants suggested there should be some type of certification process for background investigators. Patrick Callahan, Public Information Officer for Transgender Community of Police and Sheriffs, noted that some agencies, such as the Los Angeles Police Department, require 40 or more hours of training to become a background investigator. He suggested that training and certification could help agencies not only address issues of explicit or implicit bias among background investigators, but also ensure that the investigators know what an agency is looking for and are advancing those goals.

Forum participants noted that these types of issues can be exacerbated when agencies use contract personnel to conduct their background investigations. Many of the contract firms use the same basic template to conduct investigations in different agencies. As a result, the generic templates may not reflect the hiring priorities of the agency or match the inclusionary or disqualifying factors that individual agencies want to focus on.

Agencies also should consider potential bias among contract background investigators themselves. Mr. Callahan, of Transgender Community of Police and Sheriffs, has seen instances in which contractors have displayed overtly religious symbols or phrases on their business cards or other marketing materials. Such symbolism can make candidates of other religious backgrounds uncomfortable and suspicious that they will be treated differently.

In addition, forum participants noted that an agency's field training officers (FTOs) can sometimes exhibit similar tendencies as background investigators—that is, seeing themselves as informal guardians of the agency's culture. Michael Ferrence Jr., Executive Director of the Major County Sheriffs'

Association, observed, "If you go into an agency and interview the FTOs, you could then probably go through the rank and file and identify every officer or deputy who was trained by which FTO, because they have a tendency to create mini-me's." As with background investigators, the selection, training, and monitoring of FTOs are critical for agencies trying to build a high-quality and diverse workforce.

The fallout from "zero tolerance" policing

For many agencies looking to increase diversity within their ranks, recruiting and hiring more officers from within their own communities have become top priorities. In particular, agencies are looking to hire officers who have first-hand knowledge and appreciation of the underlying issues facing many of their communities.

However, participants at the hiring forum said that agencies are encountering two significant obstacles to attracting and hiring more local residents.

One obstacle is a general lack of trust in the police among many young African-Americans and members of other minority populations. Gallup surveys in 2015 and 2016 found that 39 percent of non-white Americans have a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the police; by comparison, 62 percent of whites expressed that level of confidence in the police in 2016.[15] In cities that have experienced high-profile use-of-force incidents, especially those involving white officers and African-American subjects, the level of confidence in the police is likely even lower in certain communities. Forum participants said that mistrust of the police is making it difficult for agencies to recruit and hire local residents.

A second obstacle is more tangible. Agencies are also discovering that some potential hires are ineligible to be considered because of prior arrests and convictions on minor criminal charges, such as possessing an open container of alcohol in public. This situation is especially prevalent in agencies that have practiced strict "zero tolerance" policing in the past.

> "Let's say that an agency has engaged in a crime-reduction strategy like stop and frisk. Now, you have a young man growing up in that neighborhood who has been stopped five or ten times. When he applies to become a police officer and gets to the background, the investigator finds that stop form and ends up disqualifying this person for literally living in a low-income, high-crime area. You lose candidates and you lose the will of future candidates to apply."
>
> *– Ronald L. Davis, Director, COPS Office*

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[15] Frank Newport, "U.S. Confidence in Police Recovers from Last Year's Low," Gallup, Inc., last modified June 14, 2016, http://www.gallup.com/poll/192701/confidence-police-recovers-last-year-low.aspx.

The Baltimore City Police Department has undertaken a unique approach to help overcome this obstacle. The department is working with residents to get minor criminal violations expunged from their criminal history records, thus making them eligible to enter the hiring process. Baltimore Police Major James Handley said the effort goes beyond helping individuals qualify for a job—either in the police department or with another employer where a criminal record might be a disqualifying factor. The effort is also about building trust and respect within the community, among the individuals themselves and also with their family members, friends, and neighbors.

> "We're working with residents to get expungements of minor criminal records that may have been the result of 'zero tolerance' policing. There's a two-pronged effect here. You're showing the community that you care, so you're building relationships. You're also giving opportunities to people who may have been arrested for a minor criminal charge."
>
> – *Major James Handley, Baltimore Police Department*

Looking Beyond the Background Investigation Template: A Case Study

At the hiring forum, Tucson Police Chief Chris Magnus related a story from a previous agency where he worked, which illustrates how strict adherence to a background investigation template can end up disqualifying the very type of candidate the agency is looking to hire:

In one case, there was a young woman who was working as a parking enforcement officer in a nearby city. It turns out that both of her parents had been or were currently in prison. Drug use was rampant among her family members, and there were gang ties.

Yet she was essentially raising her younger sisters because both parents were in prison, and she was managing to get herself through school without help. It was this incredible story. And yet, following a template, the background investigators said, "Oh, heck no. The parents are criminals, her brother's in a gang, absolutely not."

How crazy is that? This is exactly the type of person I wanted to hire. She was a model of maturity for someone of her age and her circumstances, and I only learned about it because somebody came to me and said, "Are you aware that this is going on? We could lose this person."

These are real issues. These are the types of things we have to think about more.

Recommendations and promising practices: Advancing diversity and inclusiveness in hiring

(Agencies listed in parentheses have implemented the promising practice that is identified.)

- Agencies should consider establishing or expanding police cadet programs as a way to bring greater numbers of local residents into their organizations and to promote diversity and community knowledge within the recruit officer ranks.

- Especially in agencies that have minimum educational requirements for officers, police cadets should have an opportunity to take college courses paid for or reimbursed by the police department *(Minneapolis Police Department; Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C.)*.

- Agencies that operate police cadet programs should consider a mentoring component, using sworn members who direct, assist, and coach program participants *(Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C.)*.

- Where such programs exist, agencies should partner with high school public safety academies as a way to recruit local residents into their police cadet and officer hiring programs *(Los Angeles Police Department; Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C.)*.

- Police executives should regularly review background investigation practices and procedures to ensure that traditions or implicit biases on the part of investigators are not disqualifying candidates who might bring fresh ideas to the agency and help achieve diversity goals.

- To guard against bias among background investigators and to ensure they understand and are supporting agency hiring goals, agencies should carefully screen and select background investigators and provide them with specialized training.

- Agencies that use independent contractors to conduct background investigations should ensure that the contractors are reflecting the agency's standards and policies, and not their own. This may require that the contractor's generic investigation template be customized to match the needs and priorities of the agency.

- Agencies should examine whether potential applicants are being disqualified because of minor arrests or previous contacts resulting from indiscriminate "zero tolerance" policing practices in the past. Where this is occurring, agencies should consider innovative approaches to overcoming this type of obstacle, such as working with residents to get minor incidents expunged from their criminal history records *(Baltimore City Police Department)*.

4. Other Issues to Consider

In addition to the wide-ranging issues discussed at the hiring forum and summarized in the previous sections of this report, forum participants also explored some narrow, specific matters. Three of those issues are presented in this chapter: the increasingly thorny question of whether police should hire applicants who have tattoos; whether police agencies should raise the minimum age for officers; and "civilianization" in policing.

Changing standards on tattoos

For decades, many police agencies in the United States had policies strictly regulating the wearing of tattoos among their officers. Most agencies either prohibited tattoos altogether or, at a minimum, placed restrictions on their size and required that they be covered at all times. The prevailing attitude was that tattoos were unprofessional and might be perceived as intimidating or inappropriate by members of the community.

Such restrictions seemed to have had a limited impact on police hiring—until recently. A surge in the popularity of tattoos, especially among young people, has forced police agencies to reconsider their traditional thinking on the issue.

Much of the debate over tattoos boils down to basic math: as more Americans are getting and displaying tattoos, the pool of job applicants who are tattoo-free or who can easily cover them is shrinking quickly. According to a 2016 Harris Poll, 29 percent of Americans have at least one tattoo, up from 21 percent just four years earlier. And among those who have tattoos, 69 percent have two or more.[16]

The generational trend with tattoos is stark. Whereas just 13 percent of Baby Boomers (defined as age 51 to 69) and 10 percent of "Matures" (age 70 or more) report having at least one tattoo, 36 percent of Gen Xers (age 36 to 50) and 47 percent of Millennials (age 18 to 35) have tattoos, and 37 percent of Millennials report having more than one.[17]

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[16] Larry Shannon-Missal, "Tattoo Takeover: Three in Ten Americans Have Tattoos, and Most Don't Stop at Just One," The Harris Poll, last modified February 10, 2016, http://www.theharrispoll.com/health-and-life/Tattoo_Takeover.html.

[17] Ibid.

> "With tattoos, you have to ask, what does the community think? If community members look at tattoos and think less of the department, then you have a problem. If they look at it and think that's just the way this generation or society is, then you have to ask yourself if you're imposing something on officers that doesn't have value."
>
> *– Ronald L. Davis, Director, COPS Office*

For police agencies, the new reality is that a sizeable percentage—now approaching half—of all potential new hires have tattoos. And the tattoo trend is likely to continue as the next generation enters the workforce: according to the same Harris Poll, already 35 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds have at least one tattoo.[18]

The hiring forum explored how different agencies are responding to these shifts regarding tattoos. Specific issues that agencies are grappling with include the following:

- Content: Ensuring that tattoos do not contain messages that are racist, sexist, obscene, or otherwise offensive, or that represent affiliation with gangs or other criminal enterprises.

- Size: Is a full-arm tattoo appropriate? Where should the line be drawn in terms of size?

- Location: Should any tattoos be visible, or should they always be covered while on duty? Should tattoos be permitted on the face, neck, and hands?

- Application: Should newly enacted policies apply only to new hires, or to current members who were hired under different standards? In other words, should current employees be allowed to get and display new tattoos?

In most cases, agencies are attempting to balance the desire to promote a professional image with the need to ensure they are not excluding a large and growing body of entry-level job-seekers who see tattoos as a matter of self-expression. Following are examples of what a few of the agencies represented at the hiring forum are doing:

- **Milwaukee Police Department: Seeking consensus**

  The Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Police Department developed its tattoo policy within the last two years. The department is currently in arbitration with its police union over the application of the new policy to veteran officers. The policy generally permits tattoos that are not visible when members are in uniform. "If we can't see it, we don't care about it. That's our attitude," explained Milwaukee

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[18] Ibid.

Assistant Chief Carianne Yerkes. With respect to tattoos that would be visible when members are in uniform, the policy prohibits new hires from having tattoos on their face, neck, or hands; those must be removed within six months of hiring. Other visible tattoos, depending on size, go before a Performance Appearance Committee composed of officers, supervisors, and a member of the executive team. The committee reviews the tattoo in question and tries to come to consensus on whether or not it needs to be covered. In practice, Assistant Chief Yerkes said that a single arm tattoo that is not obscene or offensive could likely be displayed, while a full sleeve tattoo would probably need to be covered.

- **Los Angeles Police Department: Guarding against bias, gang affiliations**

  The Los Angeles Police Department has a tattoo policy that covers both current officers and new hires. Candidates are given a copy of the policy and must sign an acknowledgment when they apply to be a police officer. The policy prohibits any tattoos that are visible, while covered tattoos cannot exceed a 3-inch-square skin patch. As part of the medical examination during the hiring process, applicants are asked to show all tattoos. The tattoos are then photographed or diagrammed, and become part of the background investigation file. Any questionable tattoos are referred to gang and narcotics detectives, who investigate the meaning and significance of the tattoos, looking in particular for possible gang references and explicit biases. "We have had to disqualify people based on gang affiliation, white supremacy messages, and other objectionable things the tattoos may refer to," said Gloria Grube, Commanding Officer of the LAPD's Administrative Services Bureau.

- **Lenexa Police Department: Adjusting to the new reality**

  Major Dawn Layman reported that the Lenexa Police Department recently revisited its strict policy prohibiting tattoos that are visible when an officer is in uniform. Supervisors and command members worked together on a compromise policy that permits arm tattoos that are not obscene or offensive, but still requires that they be covered with sleeves. Major Layman said the impetus behind the policy change is practical: "We saw that we were actually missing a lot of good candidates, including a lot from the military, who came through our process only to hear us say, 'If we hire you, you need to remove your tattoo if it's below sleeve line.'"

Several participants in the hiring forum brought up what may be the most important factor in the debate over tattoos: What does the community think? Participants suggested that all segments of the community ought to be consulted about their views on officers displaying tattoos, and that the public's input ought to be given great weight in formulating agency policy.

The Newport News Police Department followed this template in conducting a wide-ranging public comment process about tattoos. With several military bases and other installations nearby, Newport News has a high concentration of military families and is heavily influenced by military culture. When the department began seeing a large number of applicants with tattoos coming through the hiring process, the agency began to rethink the no-tattoo policy it had had in place for the past three decades.

> "We went out and asked our community. We put it out on social media, and the response was overwhelmingly positive that, yes, as long as the police officers are treating us right, we don't care what their tattoos look like. We also took the question to neighborhood watches and the same thing occurred. Residents didn't care which officer responded, or what their tattoo looked like, as long as they were treated professionally."
>
> *– Michael Grinstead, Assistant Chief of Police,*
> *Newport News (Virginia) Police Department*

One of its first steps was to seek community input. The police department put the question out on social media, and quickly learned that residents who use social media were indifferent or even positive about tattoos, as long as officers are diligent and respectful. To ensure they also reached residents who are not on social media, the department also brought the question to neighborhood watch and other public meetings. The response was similar: residents were far more concerned about professional behavior and being treated with respect than they were about seeing a tattoo. Based on the community's input, Newport News Police changed its policy on tattoos, but the chief still reserves the right to prohibit tattoos that are vulgar or offensive.

Raising the minimum age for police officers

Although not a major topic of discussion, Hiring Forum participants discussed the issue of maturity and life experience levels among today's police officer candidates. Professor Susan Hilal of Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota raised the issue of whether agencies should consider raising the minimum age to become a police officer. While many agencies require candidates to be age 21 by the time they complete their training academy, some might benefit by raising the entry level age to capture candidates with a greater degree of experience and maturity.

Some forum participants questioned whether police candidates, even at age 21, possess the maturity, judgment, and life experience that are important elements of being an effective police officer. As Commanding Officer Grube of the LAPD noted, "Let's say you have a 20- or 21-year-old who does not tell you that he used marijuana when he was in high school or college, and later it's discovered as part of the investigation that he did. Is that really a lack of integrity that he wasn't honest about it, or is it a lack of judgment or maturity?"

Other forum participants pointed out that even seemingly mature young people, including many who have attended college, may lack significant life experience outside of school. Raising the minimum age essentially would require young people to gain experience and become more well-rounded before they enter the policing profession.

> "We have to recognize that we are dealing in many cases with applicants who are, in effect, still adolescents. Their brain development is not even complete as they enter their early twenties."
>
> *– Chris Magnus, Chief of Police, Tucson (Arizona) Police Department*

While none of the law enforcement representatives at the hiring forum specifically endorsed the idea of raising the minimum age, there was general agreement on the need to acknowledge that maturity and judgment levels of young police applicants may be issues that need to be considered during the hiring process.

Recruiting and hiring qualified civilian professionals

Throughout the Hiring Forum, participants noted that to effectively manage the hiring function, agencies need to consider the full spectrum of their needs, including civilian personnel as well as officers. Agencies must work to ensure that they are putting the most qualified people in the right positions. Sometimes, that means placing a civilian professional in a position long held by a sworn member of the agency.

For example, the Seattle Police Department recently hired civilian professionals to serve as the Human Resources and Information Technology directors. In the past, these positions were held by high-level sworn personnel. Chief Operating Officer Brian Maxey said the department is now looking to civilianize other functions, including crime analysis and data analytics.

Focusing attention and resources on the civilian hiring process serves two primary objectives. First, it supports the overall mission and goals of the agency by promoting a diverse and qualified workforce. Second, it can ease some of the pressure to hire additional officers, as certain positions can be filled by civilian personnel, meaning that more sworn officers are returned to functions that require their specialized skills and training.

> "As a profession, we need to look at the whole spectrum of our hiring needs and figure out what type of people we need to accomplish the overall mission, because I think the sworn side actually has a very specific skill set, but a police department requires other skills as well."
>
> *– Brian Maxey, Chief Operating Officer,*
> *Seattle (Washington) Police Department*

Mental Health Issues in the Hiring Process and on the Job

As part of the hiring forum, Ronald S. Honberg, National Director of Policy and Legal Affairs for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), delivered remarks on exposure to trauma and its impact on officers' mental health and discussed mental health issues in the context of the police hiring process.

Following are excerpts of Mr. Honberg's remarks.

Exposure to trauma should be the expectation, rather than viewed as something unusual among police officers. I think that we have failed to recognize that over the years. I think that officers are very much like soldiers in that the tendency is to say, "Suck it up." There's a reluctance to admit that they're struggling with emotions and that they need help.

The consequences of suppressing the effects of trauma can be calamitous—alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, suicides. Suicide rates among police officers are slightly higher than the general population, which is something that doesn't get talked about a lot. But it is probably something that most police chiefs are very aware of.

At our recent NAMI convention, I heard a presentation by Sergeant A.J. DeAndrea, who's a SWAT team leader with the Arvada (Colorado) Police Department. He and his team were frontline responders at the Columbine High school massacre in 1999, and again a few years later at another shooting at a different local high school. A.J. is a big, tough-looking guy, and he was a mesmerizing speaker. He spoke about the contrast in the responses to the first and second tragedies in his community.

After the first tragedy, there were debriefings, and officers were encouraged to get help if they needed it, but there were no real proactive efforts to reach out to the officers. The fallout, he said, was significant—alcohol and drug abuse, high rates of absenteeism, people taking leave, and fights among officers.

After the second tragedy, a formal counseling program was put in place, and outreach was conducted to officers who were involved. As a result, the problems that he described occurring among officers after Columbine were significantly reduced.

The anniversary of a mass tragedy is something that strikes home for the whole community, including the first responders. Sergeant DeAndrea said that when they commemorated the first anniversary of Columbine, several officers who were

involved did so by basically drinking alone. Again, lessons were learned, and for the second tragedy, the commemoration was a 38-mile relay, which members of the SWAT team trained for over six months. He said the camaraderie and the mutual support made a big difference. They didn't hide from it. They didn't try to pretend there wasn't anything wrong. Instead, they supported each other.

So what steps can be taken to create a supportive environment for officers who have been exposed to trauma, whether it's due to a mass casualty event or another experience during the course of their jobs? The most important thing is to create an environment that encourages officers to step forward and get help when they need it.

I think most chiefs understand that, but it doesn't always translate down to the day-to-day job. It's the same thing that active duty soldiers have told me. The generals may be saying, "We need to encourage officers to seek mental health help when they need it," but the unspoken rule is "Don't acknowledge you're struggling," because the perception is that it can have negative consequences with your fellow soldiers as well as your career.

Trauma is a normal response to very difficult experiences. In order for officers to feel comfortable coming forward to deal with such trauma, agencies must make assurances that seeking help through mental health counseling or substance abuse treatment will not automatically lead to the loss of one's job. Otherwise people are going to hide it, and it's going to negatively impact not only the individual, but also that person's ability to perform the job. Officers worry a lot. I don't need to tell you that they worry about having their guns taken away. It's the same with soldiers, and it's a big, big issue.

In situations involving mass casualties, the focus is always on the victims and families, and rarely on the officers themselves. Chiefs and supervisors can set positive examples by talking about their own experiences with traumatic events, by offering flexible scheduling to officers following an incident, and with other forms of support. Officer peer support programs are very important for officers, just as they are with the military. People who've walked the walk are best able to talk the talk. If an officer needs assistance or seeks it out, you need to have it available. Ideally, you have a trusted police psychologist or a mental health professional who has experience and trust among officers. That's a little bit more difficult, particularly in rural communities, but it's important to provide it, if at all possible.

In the context of hiring, a past history of mental health treatment should not automatically be a disqualifier from employment. We are hopefully at a time in our history where we recognize that the brain is part of the body, too. Even if the person's condition doesn't rise to the level of being a serious illness, there's no crime or harm in seeking help when we need it. In fact, officers who have received assistance can really make us stronger and more effective in dealing with the kind of difficult, unpredictable situations that police officers have to deal with.

Long-term recovery is quite common, and personal experiences with mental health treatment or experience involving a loved one can be an asset for an officer on the job in terms of strengthening sensitivity, people skills, and empathy. This is particularly relevant when officers serve in specialized roles such as a Crisis Intervention Team, or when they're in a program being trained on de-escalation skills.

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Note: In May 2016, the COPS Office and NAMI released a report titled "Preparing for the Unimaginable: How Chiefs Can Safeguard Officer Mental Health Before and After Mass Casualty Events," https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p347-pub.pdf.

Recommendations and promising practices: other issues to consider

(Agencies listed in parentheses have implemented the promising practice that is identified.)

- Agencies should consider using formal "appearance committees" as a way to review and evaluate the appropriateness of particular tattoos. These committees should include representatives of front-line officers, supervisors, and executive-level personnel *(Milwaukee Police Department).*

- In evaluating their policies on tattoos, agencies should seek out and give consideration to the views of all segments of the community. This opinion outreach should be done through a variety of approaches, including social media, newsletters, and public meetings *(Newport News Police Department).*

- Irrespective of their specific minimum age requirements, agencies should consider including a critical thinking assessment component in their hiring processes to measure a candidate's maturity and judgment.

- To support their overall mission and to ease pressure on the need to hire additional sworn personnel, agencies should continuously examine which functions must be performed by officers and which ones can be filled by a civilian professional. Agencies should be rigorous in their recruiting and hiring processes for civilian personnel *(Seattle Police Department).*

Conclusion: Promising Practices for Moving the Profession Forward

> "We're hiring. . . . Get off that protest line and put an application in, and we'll put you in your neighborhood, and we will help you resolve some of the problems you're protesting about."
>
> *– David Brown, Chief of Police,*
> *Dallas (Texas) Police Department, July 11, 2016*

Dallas Police Chief David Brown issued that challenge four days after a gunman shot and killed five police officers in a premeditated ambush attack at the conclusion of an otherwise peaceful Black Lives Matter rally in downtown Dallas. Applications to the Dallas Police Department soon quadrupled, according to Patricia Marsolais, Director of Dallas Civil Service. "People are very enthusiastic and eager to move along in the process," she told the hiring forum.

Encouraging people to submit applications is only one part of the hiring process, however. As participants at the forum discussed, enhanced recruiting efforts are wasted if agencies cannot effectively screen and identify the highest quality candidates, get them through the hiring process in a quick and efficient manner, and then closely monitor their performance in the academy and on the street during field training.

The hiring forum examined the challenges and opportunities facing police agencies today as they work to improve hiring processes and increase the size and the quality of their workforces. The consensus among participants was that continuing to do things the way they have always been done is not a viable option for agencies looking to build organizations that can meet the challenges of 21st century policing.

The generational shifts taking place in the American workplace are unrelenting. Millennials, and now the first members of Generation Z, dominate the entry-level applicant pool. They represent the bulk of the individuals that police agencies must recruit and hire for years to come. Police departments must understand how these new generations differ from past generations and adjust their systems accordingly.

Some of the differences between the young and older generations are deep and fundamental. Many of today's young people do not envision spending their entire lives in a single career, much less a single job. Today's young people are accustomed to getting what they want within seconds or hours, whether it is information they want or goods and services. They are not favorably impressed by police agency hiring systems that seem to be overly bureaucratic, complicated, and opaque, and which require many

months to come to a decision. Other issues are smaller but not necessarily less important. Nearly half of the members of the Millennial generation have at least one tattoo. Police agencies will find it increasingly difficult to maintain strict bans on tattoos as a condition of employment.

For many tradition-bound police organizations, these changes are difficult. But agencies that don't adapt will be left behind, struggling to maintain a sufficient number of officer candidates and to develop a high-quality workforce.

As daunting as the challenges are, the hiring forum highlighted numerous examples of agencies that are adapting to change and successfully re-engineering their hiring processes:

- Through a combination of streamlining a slow and archaic process and adding new technology, the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C. reduced the time it takes to hire a new officer from 12-18 months to just 3-4 months.

- To keep a steady, manageable flow of candidates in the hiring pipeline, agencies such as the Los Angeles Police Department are offering entry-level testing on a regular basis, as opposed to administering "mega-exams" every year or two. And to make sure they are retaining their highest-quality candidates, agencies such as the New Orleans Police Department are offering continuous hiring programs in which individuals are hired in a civilian capacity until an academy class can be formed.

- In Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., police agencies have created new customer service resources—both online and in person—to assist candidates through the process. This is considered especially important for the new generation of job seekers.

- To get a better read on the full range of candidates' traits and characteristics, the Dallas Police Department is focusing on face-to-face interviews with applicants, which include scenario-based questioning. In Kalamazoo, Michigan, candidates go on ride-alongs with officers and get involved in community engagement activities to evaluate their interpersonal skills.

- Agencies are looking to develop physical fitness standards that are evidence-based and job-related. And some agencies, such as the Lenexa (Kansas) Police Department, are emphasizing physical fitness throughout an officer's career, not just at the beginning.

- Illinois created a statewide registry of officers who were terminated for misconduct or who resigned while under investigation, to make it easier for hiring agencies to learn about a candidate's previous law enforcement history. In addition, the National Decertification Index includes more than 21,400 certificate or license revocation actions reported by agencies in 40 participating states. It provides hiring agencies with a national resource for investigating possible certificate or license revocations of potential candidates.

- Several cities, including Boston and Minneapolis, are revitalizing or expanding their police cadet programs as a way to attract and groom more "home-grown" talent. Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., are partnering their cadet programs with public high schools that offer specialized criminal justice curricula, as a direct pathway into the agency.

- The Baltimore Police Department is helping city residents expunge very minor offenses—for violations such as carrying an open container of alcohol in public—from their criminal history records so that more city residents can qualify for jobs, not just in the police department but with other employers as well.

- To gain the community's perspective on officers who display tattoos, the Newport News (Virginia) Police Department conducted an extensive public outreach campaign. The outreach revealed that residents were far more interested in the professionalism of officers than their appearance. The department adjusted its tattoo policy accordingly.

- The Seattle Police Department is emphasizing the recruiting and hiring of civilian personnel, as a way to support the overall mission of the agency and to ease some of the pressure on hiring officers.

This report highlights these and other promising practices that are making the police hiring process more efficient, effective, fair, and inclusive. The report provides more than two dozen recommendations for how agencies of all sizes can better navigate the highly competitive and turbulent hiring landscape of today. For many agencies, implementing the types of best practices described in this report will be necessary to keep up with other professions that are vying for the same pool of applicants, and to maintain competitiveness with other police agencies.

Not all agencies will be able to adopt every recommendation or promising practice outlined in this report. But every agency would be well served to take a close look at its hiring practices and outcomes —that is, how successful it is at recruiting, hiring, and retaining the caliber of talent the agency wants and the community demands.

Agencies that don't recognize the changes taking place in police hiring today, and don't adapt to those changes, will face more officer vacancies in the future, continued pressures to hire quickly, and, perhaps most importantly, a talent gap in their organizations.

But agencies that recognize and embrace change will be on track to maintain their numbers while also filling their ranks with the types of officers that are best suited for the challenges of 21st century policing. Recruiting, hiring, and retaining the right people are the critical first steps to achieving the larger goals of reducing crime and building relationships of trust with the community.

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About PERF

The **Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)** is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force, developing community policing and problem-oriented policing, using technologies to deliver police services to the community, and evaluating crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership, public debate of police and criminal justice issues, and research and policy development.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual law enforcement agencies, educates hundreds of police officials each year in a three-week executive development program, and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected president and board of directors and a board-appointed executive director. A staff of approximately 30 full-time professionals is based in Washington, D.C.

To learn more, visit PERF online at www.policeforum.org.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office**) is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community police and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Another source of COPS Office assistance is the Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance (CRI-TA). Developed to advance community policing and ensure constitutional practices, CRI-TA is an independent, objective process for organizational transformation. It provides recommendations based on expert analysis of policies, practices, training, tactics, and accountability methods related to issues of concern.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than $14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing.

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 127,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.

- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.

- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs.

- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

The COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—can be downloaded at www.cops.usdoj.gov. This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

The *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* noted that the quality of American policing depends upon the quality of its officers and stressed the importance of hiring individuals who reflect the diversity and values of the community—and also have the character and social skills to positively engage with it. This was emphasized in a later task force meeting with President Obama, who asked the COPS Office to explore promising practices and policies for hiring and retaining officers who meet these requirements. In response, the COPS Office and the Police Executive Research Forum hosted the Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer forum. This report details the discussions and recommendations of the forum, which included experts in police standards, screening, and hiring. Their insights and recommendations in areas such as psychological screening, educational requirements, promotion policies, and methods for retaining the best officers can be of great value to Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) commissions, HR, and agency executives.