

# CRI-TAC SPOTLIGHT



## Report Out from Rhode Island Regional Roundtable on Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

The West Greenwich (Rhode Island) Police Department (WGPD) requested assistance through the Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) to host an event for local law enforcement agencies from Rhode Island and the surrounding areas to discuss challenges in recruitment, hiring, and retention. On January 29, 2020, CRI-TAC hosted *Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention: National and Local Trends*, a roundtable discussion in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. More than 35 individuals participated, representing nearly every law enforcement agency in Rhode Island and one from New York. This document summarizes and annotates the discussions from that roundtable, supplemented by a list of additional resources. It is not intended to be prescriptive, but to represent the opinions and suggestions given by subject matter experts (SME) at the event.

### About the CRI-TAC Spotlight

Developed through CRI-TAC, the CRI-TAC Spotlight series is committed to advancing knowledge through sharing tools, resources, and information for the law enforcement field as a result of customized training and technical assistance delivered by CRI-TAC.

# Recruitment

All law enforcement agencies in Rhode Island have independent application processes, and applicants may find the process redundant. Roundtable participants brought up the following considerations and points of discussion related to recruitment:

Streamline and standardize the application process to reduce redundancies for applicants.

- Implement a statewide process or platform, such as [PoliceApp](#), for applicants to compare agencies and submit applications.
- Create a standard application, including a one-time payment of application fees rather than the multiple payments and applications individuals submit currently.
- Enhance processes to reduce poaching of applicants.
  - Formal processes may include legislation and other public policies.
  - Agreements between agencies may be formalized through Memoranda of Understanding.
- Select the right recruiters. Everyone in the agency should be referring quality applicants, but carefully consider who should be attending recruiting events on behalf of the agency.
- Employee referral programs can be effective and allow everyone to contribute to the organizational culture.
  - Incentives for successful referrals might include monetary funds, paid time off, housing stipends, etc.
  - Incentives could be provided in one-time lump sums once an applicant is hired, or divided out with an additional incentive when the applicant passes the one-year mark.
- Market and brand the profession and individual agencies.
  - Shift the narrative to show the realities of the profession and provide clear expectations to potential applicants.
  - Highlight what makes individual agencies and communities special.
  - Develop a brand that showcases the benefits of working for your agency.
  - Spotlight personal and professional growth opportunities, in addition to other compensation benefits.
  - Incorporate innovative marketing approaches including social media platforms, videos, mailers and postcards, and speaking or recruiting at local schools.

## Hiring

The hiring period and process for applicants in Rhode Island is often redundant and may pit agencies against one another when testing or interview dates are scheduled concurrently. Applicants may find it challenging to be required to participate in physical fitness tests, interviews, or other hiring tasks multiple times for multiple agencies. Roundtable participants brought up the following considerations and points of discussion related to the hiring process:

- Host orientations or open houses for applicants and other community members to ask questions, understand the hiring process, and see demonstrations of physical fitness standards.
- Evaluate the ability to have a statewide physical fitness test proctor.
  - Some states, such as Connecticut, have found success in using services which proctor standard physical fitness tests and provide passing applicants with a certificate valid for a set period of time. Agencies can accept this certificate in lieu of conducting an agency-specific fitness test.
- Modify physical fitness test activities to model job-specific tasks; further consider the role of a post-hire fitness test.
- Acknowledge and respond to applicants promptly and routinely throughout the hiring process.
  - Whether via text, email, or letter, acknowledging receipt of application and outlining next steps will provide touchpoints with applicants to keep them engaged in the process.
  - Tentative offers of employment may lead applicants to become further invested in the agency hiring process.
- Include diverse individuals, internal and external to the law enforcement agency, in the oral board interview.
- Hire retired law enforcement for background checks, which can free up agency personnel time.
- Provide guidance and insight to applicants not accepted or hired.
  - Encourage applicants to reapply and provide tangible feedback for improvement.
  - Conduct personalized outreach when providing feedback, which may increase the candidate's desire to reapply.
- Evaluate and establish educational and other qualifying standards to ensure they align with state requirements and community expectations.

## Retention

Discussion of retention of quality personnel within law enforcement agencies centered around why individuals most often leave an agency or the profession and how agencies across Rhode Island and New York can retain personnel.

Roundtable participants brought up the following considerations and points of discussion related to retention:

- Understand why individuals typically stay in or leave jobs. Use this data to develop a culture to retain personnel.
- Paul Zak, in *The Neurobiology of Trust* and the *Neuroscience of Trust*, outlines factors of human interaction and the intersection with trusting organizational structures. The key concepts Zak proposes for why people remain in positions can apply to law enforcement agencies.
  - Apply key concepts of procedural justice internally to strengthen morale and foster a culture of ownership and loyalty.
- Hire the right people. Initial hiring decisions are critical to retaining quality staff. Develop a brand and hire to fit that brand.
  - Many agencies choose to keep a vacancy open rather than hire someone who may not fit into the organizational culture.
- Dig deeper into potential underlying or systemic reasons people leave. Compensation is often cited as a rationale to leave, but there may be more to the decision that is within the control of agency leadership.
  - Competitive pay matters, to a degree, but organizational culture matters more.
  - Reevaluate compensation packages as appropriate. It is more expensive to hire new personnel than to provide additional compensation to current personnel.
  - Calculate all the factors involved in hiring for an accurate picture of the cost. Consider overtime costs, fees for testing, and the cost and time of background checks, training, etc.
- Reevaluate traditional standards to determine their relevance to today's work environment. Organizational culture can impact an individual's interest in staying with an agency.
  - Beards, tattoos, and general appearance standards may be loosened without diminishing professional service delivery. This may boost morale or contribute to personnel's sense of self-expression.
  - Training opportunities both benefit the individual and pay dividends to the agency. Consider how training and assignments should be approached to provide personnel growth opportunities.

## Conclusion

Recruitment, hiring, and retention are universal law enforcement challenges. Individual agencies should evaluate their recruitment and hiring processes consistently and allow them to evolve to suit their circumstances. The attendees of the

Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention: National and Local Trends roundtable provided lessons learned, challenges, and suggestions to help agencies meet this goal.

---

## Additional Resources

*The State of Recruitment: a Crisis for Law Enforcement.* International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), February 2020. This resource discusses the status of recruitment and its impact on the law enforcement profession.

*Recruitment and Retention for 2019 and Beyond.* Ray Arcuri for IACP's *Police Chief Magazine*, 2019. This article outlines key considerations for recruitment strategies, ideal applicants, and marketing vacancies.

*Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success.* U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), 2017. This publication discusses key considerations for hiring candidates with shared values, making the hiring process more efficient, and advancing diversity in the hiring process.

*The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies are Doing About It.* Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), September 2019. This report covers the findings of a PERF Survey on recruiting and retaining the next generation of officers.

*More than Public Service: A Field Experiment on Job Advertisements and Diversity in Police.* Elizabeth Linos for *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, November 2017. This article analyzes job advertisements to determine which messaging has the greatest impact on applicant numbers and candidate diversity.

*How Do Cops Choose Their Specific Departments?* Dolan Consulting Group (DCG), February 2020. This article discusses the findings of the DCG Police Recruiting and Hiring Survey, which focused on reasons individuals selected their law enforcement agency.

*Law Enforcement Best Practices: Lessons Learned from the Field.* COPS Office, October 2019. This wide-ranging report covers numerous areas of the law enforcement profession, including recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention.

## Acknowledgements

The WGPD and attending agencies proactively sought assistance for challenges and trends in recruitment, hiring, and retention. The participants involved in this roundtable were engaged and thoughtful; as participants in Collaborative Reform, they contributed to the body of knowledge summarized in this report. CRI-TAC SMEs Kym Craven, Edward Denmark, David Kurz, and Fernando Spagnolo provided

insights and considerations to the WGPD and participants based on their wealth of knowledge, experience, and expertise. Leadership and staff at the COPS Office and the CRI-TAC coordinated this effort, ensured the technical assistance was responsive to the WGPD's needs, and provided oversight, management, and administration of the program.



[www.COPS.USDOJ.gov](http://www.COPS.USDOJ.gov) | [www.CollaborativeReform.org](http://www.CollaborativeReform.org)

This project was supported, in whole or in part, by cooperative agreement number 2017-CR-WX-K001 awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) or contributor(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific individuals, agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.



U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Community Oriented  
Policing Services  
145 N Street NE  
Washington, DC 20530

To obtain details about COPS Office programs, call  
the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).

Published 2020  
e052013949