

Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs as a Potential Recruitment Pipeline

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Letter from the Director of the COPS Office

Colleagues:

Of all the resources a law enforcement agency needs, perhaps the most vital is its people. Recruiting and retaining an engaged and effective workforce is a top priority for agencies across the country—agencies which are feeling both the pinch of Baby Boom generation retirements and the necessity of recruiting officers who reflect their communities' diversity.

But across the country, declining applicant pools—whether resulting from economic factors, or from younger generations' changing career preferences and their views of law enforcement—are making recruitment a challenge, and engagement with communities more necessary than ever. One promising form of outreach used by many agencies across the country is the wide spectrum of programs that introduce young people to the possibilities of a law enforcement career.

As part of our focus on recruitment and retention issues, the COPS Office partnered with RAND and Law and Public Safety Education Network (LAPSEN) to conduct a census of U.S. youth law enforcement programs: from after-school Explorer branches and summer camps for children, to magnet schools and vocational programs for teens, to internships for college students.

This publication provides actionable results of that census: a roadmap of considerations for agencies thinking of implementing youth programs, including costs, time investment, and staffing, as well as information on how to use the census data to reach out to sister agencies for advice and mentorship. This guide will help law enforcement agencies across the country connect to young people in their communities, contributing to the mutual goals of successful recruitment for agencies, providing a fulfilling career of service for young people, and strengthening community ties between them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hugh T. Clements, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hugh T. Clements, Jr.

Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank our Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for their feedback and guidance in the development of the Census Database and this guide. We also are grateful for the input and guidance of Nicole Pruss, Social Science Analyst with the COPS Office who oversaw this project. We also appreciate the careful review and feedback provided by Dr. John Engberg and Dr. Charlie Scheer.

1. Context and Development of this Guide

What is the importance of youth law enforcement experience programs?

Beginning with the legitimacy crisis that came to national attention following the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, many challenges to police recruiting, retention, and training have emerged (Kochel 2019). Since then, law enforcement agencies (LEA) have faced periods of economic uncertainty, a worldwide pandemic, and a renewed national call for police reform following the 2020 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Other issues affecting law enforcement recruitment include relatively high employment, negative community attitudes toward law enforcement, and changing work preferences of the young adult population. In addition, many LEAs hope to recruit a workforce that reflects the diversity of their communities (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing 2015).

While LEAs across the United States have made various changes to their recruitment strategies in response to the challenges they face, these responses have yet to be documented in detail, and their effectiveness is unknown. With ongoing Baby Boom generation retirements, rapidly declining applicant pools, and high competition for qualified applicants all increasing the need for successful officer recruitment, meeting these challenges is becoming imperative for LEAs (Wilson and Grammich 2009). Despite this pressing need, however, LEAs today continue to be hindered by such factors as a lack of strategic planning for recruitment, poor understanding of the labor market, and outdated advertising and marketing methods (Allen 2018; Wilson and Grammich 2009). Thus, the current recruitment crisis requires a multipronged strategy. Youth experience programs offer concrete opportunities for learning about and experiencing law enforcement as a profession and have the potential to help strengthen community relations.

To increase the capacity of LEAs to implement innovative youth programs that introduce and promote careers in law enforcement, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) provided funding to RAND, in partnership with the Law and Public Safety Education Network (LAPSEN), to conduct a census of youth law enforcement experience programs in the United States. In addition, RAND and

LAPSEN were charged with identifying example programs and with developing resources—including a census database, a detailed guide, and a project website—to support implementation of youth law enforcement experience programs or a refinement of LEA efforts to develop a recruitment pipeline. This guide is intended to provide a roadmap for law enforcement, public safety officials, educators, and program staff who are considering developing a new youth law enforcement experience program or who currently have such a program and would like additional information to help improve or expand it. The guide summarizes the results of the census of youth law enforcement experience programs, provides guidance on how to use the database to search for programs, describes some of the key features of these programs, and discusses implementation considerations. In addition, the guide provides a list of additional resources and examples of the main types of program found by our census: (1) non-school programs (e.g., internship programs, explorer/cadet programs, and youth camps or academies), which are typically managed exclusively by one LEA as a pipeline for recruitment, and (2) school career programs (e.g., stand-alone high schools, law enforcement career academies, career and technical education programs, pipeline programs), which are typically administered through a public school system with LEA involvement and focus on preparing students for public safety careers.

Given the potential of youth experience programs to positively impact officer recruitment and strengthen community relations, it is surprising that such programs are rarely discussed or recommended in such major guidelines as the Police Executive Research Forum's (PERF) 2019 *The Workforce Crisis and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It*, the International Association of Chiefs of Police's (IACP) 2008 manual *Police Chief's Desk* (2nd edition), or the *Law Enforcement Recruitment Toolkit* (McBride et al. 2009). The current recruitment crisis requires a multipronged strategy, including a focus on youth experience programs that offer concrete opportunities for learning about and experiencing law enforcement as a profession. Further, for those agencies that have a hiring age requirement of 21 years or older, recruitment should use the concept of a pipeline, with the goal of "growing your own" (Morrison 2017).

How was the guide developed?

We convened a technical advisory group (TAG) comprising representatives from major law enforcement associations and different types of youth law enforcement experience programs (see the appendix for the list of TAG members) to help guide this effort. The TAG helped us refine the definitions of the different types of youth law enforcement experience programs, develop the criteria for identifying programs to include in the census database, gather existing lists and directories, and

identify programs for more in-depth information gathering. In addition, the TAG helped facilitate contacts with example programs.

What this guide is designed to do?

This guide is intended to be a starting point for law enforcement, public safety officials, educators, and program staff who are considering developing a new youth law enforcement experience program or who currently have such a program and would like additional information to help improve or expand it. Specifically, the guide summarizes the results of the census of youth law enforcement experience programs, provides guidance on how to use the database to search for programs, and describes some of the key features of these programs (section 3). In addition, the guide provides examples of non-school programs, school career programs, and pipeline programs (section 4). These examples are not intended as best practices but rather to illustrate the key features of different types of programs. The guide ends with implementation considerations (section 5) and a list of additional resources (section 6).

How to use this guide

Because not all readers enter with the same knowledge or interests in the information, the guide is designed to be flexible so users can quickly jump to the information that is most useful to them. Figure 1 provides a flowchart to help readers navigate this guide.

Figure 1. How to Navigate the Guide

Go to section 2 for...	Background on current law enforcement workforce challenges, approaches to recruitment, and youth attitudes toward law enforcement as a career
Go to section 3 for...	Census of youth law enforcement experience programs Key features of these programs
Go to section 4 for...	Examples of different types of programs
Go to section 5 for...	Implementation issues to consider
Go to section 6 for...	Additional resources

2. Background

Current law enforcement workforce challenges

Even before the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the renewed focus on police reform and legitimacy, groups such as PERF were already documenting significant staffing challenges facing law enforcement agencies. In their 2019 report, PERF noted that agencies were experiencing declines in applications and increases in resignations and placing an emphasis on hiring officers with a mix of skills and experience to meet the demands of police work. These challenges were echoed in a report by the IACP, which in 2019 indicated that 78 percent of agencies surveyed faced difficulties recruiting qualified candidates. To address these issues, LEAs tried different approaches, such as monetary incentives, relaxed standards, and innovative recruitment strategies.

Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, policing was thrown into a tumultuous position with sustained calls for reform amid both peaceful and chaotic scenes of protest—some of which likely worsened the workforce issues in many agencies. Although published academic research is currently scant, one study shows significant retention issues following the George Floyd murder and ensuing calls for reform (Mourtgos, Adams, and Nix 2021). The problem of retaining officers increases the demand for a steady pipeline of qualified personnel; this demand was further highlighted by a 2021 workforce survey conducted by PERF, showing modest decreases in hiring year-over-year but significant increases in both resignations and retirements. A similar survey of Illinois agencies further showed staffing problems, with increases in retirements and resignations and decreases in applications when compared to historical figures (Wojcicki 2022). Further, there have been myriad news stories about staffing issues affecting LEAs across the country.

Approaches to recruitment

In the past, LEAs have typically pursued a variety of officer recruitment strategies. Overall, it is difficult to pinpoint all recruiting efforts underway in the nation's 18,000 LEAs, efforts which may be highly dependent on

budget, time, agency culture, and other factors. A RAND survey of LEAs, however, found that the most common forms of recruitment, used by more than 80 percent of agencies, were career fairs, internet marketing, and newspaper advertising (Wilson, Rostker, and Fan 2010). LEAs also reported recruitment strategies that involved more direct engagement with youth including explorer/cadet programs (63 percent), high school outreach (52 percent), college internships (52 percent), and college outreach (75 percent). In addition to continuing these traditional recruitment methods, LEAs are using several new approaches to reach (and hire) prospective applicants:¹

- **Social media.** Social media provides a cost-effective manner to reach potential applicants (IACP 2011) but is only likely to reach applicants if the LEA selects a platform, such as Instagram, that is widely used among the target population (Ziegler 2020). One study of police recruitment and community engagement found that among those interviewed who had knowledge of recruiting efforts (e.g., police chiefs, human resources staff), social media and online recruiting were rated highly against other measures, although many respondents were not sure which recruitment strategies were effective (International City/County Management Association 2018).

1. Note that we have not included “passive” recruiting tools such as hiring bonuses or relaxed standards (e.g., fitness/physical abilities testing, grooming policies) and have instead focused on efforts that actively engage with target populations.

- **Online marketing.** Some LEAs have turned to online marketing and targeted ads for recruitment (Fussell 2021). For example, some LEAs are using online marketing for specific outreach to women and minority communities (International City/County Management Association 2018). Others are increasing recruitment budgets to launch marketing campaigns and partner with digital marketing firms.
- **Early mentoring.** Mentoring is not a new concept in law enforcement, but starting to foster relationships during the recruiting process is still somewhat innovative. For example, a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) report highlighted the power of mentoring for women in law enforcement, including during the hiring process (Starheim 2019), and mentoring has been cited as a promising practice for recruits in general (PERF 2019).
- **Continuous outreach during the application process.** Maintaining contact with recruits during the hiring process has shown to be a promising practice (Dudley 2019). This process, which can be as simple as a text message or postcard nudge, has helped boost applicant numbers in various locales (Linos 2018; South 2022). For example, the New Jersey State Police have personalized the hiring process with multiple touchpoints for potential candidates through emails, open houses, career nights, and virtual career development sessions (New Jersey State Police 2022). It has also been shown that the messaging—how the department markets itself—is important in such contacts with prospective officers (Linos, 2018).

Overall, LEAs are finding that they need to appeal to specific audiences and show them the reality of police work (IACP 2019; PERF 2019). These strategies are part of a larger trend towards LEAs “growing their own.” Youth experience programs are an important part of this recruitment strategy, as illustrated by various researcher, practitioner, and collaborative efforts (Elkins 2019; PERF 2019). Programs that involve the community, while not limited to youth engagement, are a promising way to recruit and provide young people with exposure to a law enforcement career.

Youth attitudes toward law enforcement as a career

Past research has shown that positive attitudes toward police, in general, decrease from childhood into adolescence, and this decrease appears to be much greater for racial and ethnic minority children than White children (Fine, Padilla, and Tom 2020). A 2019 report by the U.S. Department of Justice noted two reasons why youth (or younger workers) may be dissuaded from a law enforcement career (95):

- “Strained relations and a lack of trust of law enforcement may deter individuals from applying. High-profile police incidents involving the use of force, and the resulting civil unrest, tend to increase this distrust.
- The reputation of paramilitary operational practices of law enforcement agencies may dissuade younger applicants from pursuing a career in law enforcement.”

These attitudes toward policing likely continue into adulthood, given the various incidents between the police and the public, including the murder of George Floyd, highly publicized use of force incidents (whether justified or not), and responses to protests and civil unrest. These negative attitudes about policing, of course, follow a previous legitimacy crisis in policing that peaked in 2014–2015 and affected interest in police careers (Todak 2017; Morrow et al. 2019). Other work has shown that race, age, gender, or prior police contacts also play a role in interest in police careers (Rossler, Scheer, and Suttmoeller 2018; Li et al. 2021).

Overall, the pressure on LEAs nationwide, whether stemming from recent incidents or from historical inequities, is a challenge that can significantly impact youth attitudes toward joining a police agency. Our effort to lift up youth law enforcement experience programs as a recruitment strategy highlights one manner in which communities and LEAs might bridge the gaps with young people and promote interest in law enforcement careers.

3. Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs

This section defines the different categories and types of youth law enforcement experience programs in the United States and provides an overview of the census database we compiled, which lists more than 3,500 youth law enforcement experience programs. We also summarize information gleaned from interviews with representatives of a select group of programs on the key features of their programs.

Program categories and types

The three main types of youth law enforcement experience programs in the United States are non-school programs, school career programs, and pipeline programs (figure 2).

Non-school programs are typically managed exclusively by one LEA for recruitment purposes and include the following:

- **Explorer/cadet programs or posts, which are sponsored by local, state, and federal LEAs and provide training and exposure to law enforcement.** While there are two basic national models

Figure 2. Program categories and types

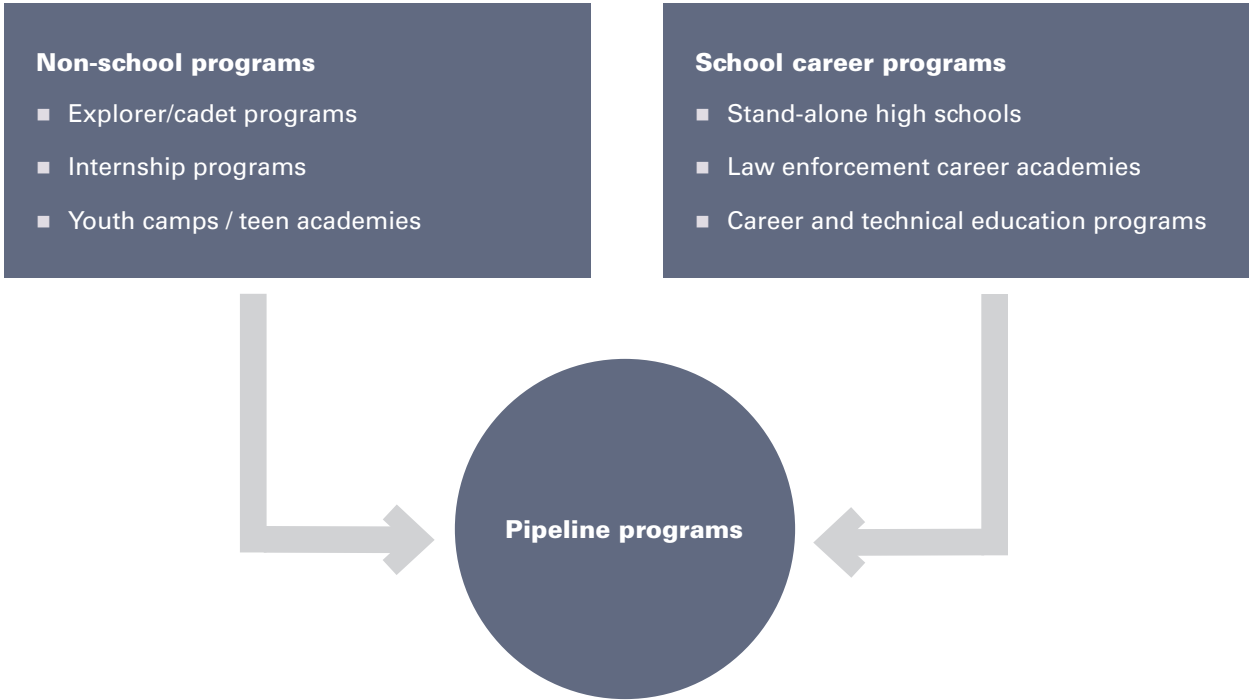


Table 1. Distribution of program categories in the census database

PROGRAM CATEGORY/TYPE	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Non-school programs	1,482	40.2%
Explorer/cadet programs	1,092	29.6%
Internship programs	185	5.0%
Youth camps / teen academies	205	5.6%
School career programs	2,207	59.8%
Total	3,689	100.0%

(Law Enforcement Exploring and Public Safety Cadets), local LEAs also sponsor similar programs that are not affiliated with these national models.

- **Internship programs, which may also be called cadet or apprenticeship programs.** These are both paid and unpaid positions that are used to help youth decide if law enforcement is the right career for them and whether they want to work in the LEA hosting the program.
- **Youth camps/academies or similarly named programs, which are run by LEAs for middle or high school students interested in law enforcement.** These are typically at least a week long (though some are longer) and provide exposure to law enforcement without requiring the ongoing commitment of an explorer program.

School career programs are typically administered through a public school system with LEA involvement and focus on preparing students for public safety careers and include the following:

- Stand-alone high schools that focus entirely on law and public safety careers.
- Law enforcement career academies that operate within high schools.
- Career and technical education (CTE) programs that are affiliated with high schools, including
 - center programs where high schools send their students for part of the week to participate in a career program;

- concurrent enrollment where high school students take college courses in a career area;
- comprehensive high schools that offer a number of career programs to both their own students and students from other schools within the same school system.

Pipeline programs typically include middle, high school, or post-high school students and consist of two or more unique programs that are sequential. Pipeline programs can include a mixture of school career and non-school programs or multiple school career or non-school programs: for example, a high school CTE program that feeds into an internship program or a middle school exposure program that feeds into an explorer/cadet program or high school career program.

Census database of youth law enforcement experience programs

The census database compiled for this project is a listing of more than 3,500 youth law enforcement experience programs that span the three types of non-school programs and school career programs (table 1). In the census database, pipeline programs are categorized as one of these four program types but not categorized separately as such, because there is not information across all of the entries about which programs are part of a pipeline. See the appendix for details on our approach to compiling the census database.

The database is available on the LAPSEN website, Census Database of Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs: (<https://lapsen.org/searchable-program-directory/>). (Figure 3 on page 7 shows a screenshot. The database can be searched by name, location, or state and filtered by program type (i.e., School Career, Explorer/Cadet, Internship, Youth Camp/ Teen Academy). Each listing includes the program name, host organization, and state. When available, the database also includes a web address, primary contact information, address, and other program specific information such as the age range served, enrollment, program length and intensity, and LEAs involved with the program.

To support the implementation of youth law enforcement experience programs, LAPSEN has expanded its Training and Technical Assistance Group (TTAG). The TTAG is made up of volunteer instructors and leaders of both school career and non-school programs. Anyone interested in receiving advice and assistance about starting, expanding, or modifying a youth law enforcement experience program may access the list of TTAG members and identify who might best be able to help with the LEA's specific situation. There is no cost for virtual consultation with the TTAG. On-site assistance is also available and will be negotiated based on the specific need. Information on the TTAG can be found at <https://lapsen.org/ttag/>.

Key program features of youth law enforcement experience programs

We used feedback from the TAG and our review of programs in the census database to identify candidate programs to highlight in the guide (See "Identification of Example Programs" in the appendix). We conducted informational interviews with a select group of these youth law enforcement

experience programs to gather information on some of their key features that may be useful to those looking to start or modify a program. We conducted 18 interviews: seven with explorer/cadet programs, three with internship programs, three with youth camps / teen academies, and five with school career programs). One of the school career programs was also part of a pipeline program.

The census database also provides information on the overall structure of the programs included. The remainder of this chapter summarizes different aspects of youth law enforcement experience programs based on these two sources of information. The programs highlighted here and in the more detailed profiles in section 4 are not representative of all programs, but do represent the different categories and types of youth law enforcement experience programs and a range of LEA sizes and geographic areas. (See the appendix for more details on how we identified and selected programs for the informational interviews.)

Figure 3. Screenshot of LAPSEN youth directory

In this image, Youth Camp / Teen Academy is selected as an example.

The screenshot shows the LAPSEN youth directory interface. On the left is a filter sidebar with search and filter options. The main area displays a map of the United States with numerous location pins. Below the map is a table listing program details.

Name	Organization/Location	Primary Contact	Length	Age Range	Staff/Student
Junior Police Academy NA	Allen Police Department Allen, TX	NA NA	—	7-12th grade	NA / —
State Police Youth Week NA	American Legion CONNECTICUT Hartford, CT	Steve Pinterich	—	16-17	NA / —
Trooper Youth Week NA	American Legion DELAWARE Dover, DE	NA NA	—	10-12th grade	NA / —
Youth Law Cadet Academy NA	American Legion FLORIDA Gainesville, FL	Bob Brewster	—	16-18	NA / —

Program goals

Our interviews confirmed that the overall goals for youth law enforcement experience programs are to introduce youth to law enforcement and give them opportunities to explore law enforcement as a possible career. Across all program categories, programs emphasize providing participating youth with knowledge, skills, and practical experiences to prepare them for a career in law enforcement or to make a decision whether such a career is right for them. One school career program representative noted that recruitment is an overall goal of their program; other goals mentioned by other interviewees included the desire to engage with youth and promote positive relationships between youth and the police. A few programs describe their overall goals as developing youth leadership skills or giving youth opportunities to serve.

Program activities

The structure of youth law enforcement experience programs varies considerably by category and type. Most **explorer/cadet programs** serve youth 14 to 21 years of age, with some variation in when participants age out of the program. Programs typically meet weekly, with some meeting monthly. Program length varies from 12 weeks to throughout the school year to year-round. The regular meetings provide education and training on various aspects of law enforcement. These regular sessions are supplemented by other activities such as law enforcement skills competitions, community service events, honor guard, and team-building trips.

“The goal is for them to work in different facets of the agency to learn and prepare for a law enforcement career.”

– Interview with internship program representative

“This is a youth-run organization. We have advisors that assist them, but most of the responsibility is put on them to help them build leadership skills. This is their organization, and they need to run it.”

– Interview with explorer/cadet program representative

“During the program they are assigned to different divisions throughout the department. They may be assigned to divisions like homicide or violent crimes; they are transferred to a different division each month and they learn what each division does. They switch divisions for about a year.”

– Interview with internship program representative

For **internship programs**, the education requirements range from a high school diploma or equivalent to concurrent college enrollment. Some LEAs have other requirements such as written tests, recommendations, interviews, and background checks. Internships are a mix of full- and part-time positions, with commitments ranging from 10 to 40 hours per week. Internship lengths vary from one semester to two years or more.

Summer **youth camps / teen academies** tend to focus on high school students, with some extending eligibility to middle school students. Some programs draw youth from all over the state, while others are more geographically targeted. The programs typically last one week with an eight-hour per day commitment; some are overnight camps. These programs are often taught by law enforcement personnel who deliver

educational courses covering various aspects of law enforcement. Camps and academies expose participants to a wide range of experts and often include leadership development, team-building skills, community service, and physical fitness training.

School career programs vary widely. Some are a sequence of two criminal justice courses; others are multiyear programs where students take up to eight law enforcement classes in three years, while still others are police academies that teach a complete curriculum of core academic classes through a law enforcement lens. School career programs also often offer related courses in subjects such as emergency dispatch, forensics, or drone operations. Some school career programs also involve activities such as physical training, color guard or drill team, community service, and field-based training opportunities.

“It is a 9th–12th grade program that starts with the basic academic classes. It gives the teachers the opportunity to creatively tackle their subject area through a law enforcement strand. In history they study the beginning of law enforcement, in math geometry lessons could be about the trajectory of bullets in a crime scene. Then we throw in electives. Students take a CTE pathway with classes geared towards law enforcement.”

– Interview with school career program representative

Youth recruitment and outreach

Participant recruitment is a key activity for youth law enforcement experience programs. Most of the programs whose staff we interviewed recruit new participants through word of mouth from current program participants or staff. Many programs also have a social media presence with postings about program activities that help them reach a wider range of youth and families. Other recruitment methods include mailings, flyers or advertisements, and community events.

The explorer/cadet programs, internship programs, and youth camps whose staff we interviewed also commonly recruit through the schools, relying on teachers, counselors, and career advisors as well as school resource officers and school deputies to tell students about their programs. Some programs also conduct school visits or participate in school open houses to identify youth who are potentially interested in law enforcement as a career. Some school career programs have dedicated recruiting units or staff, particularly stand-alone high schools or magnet schools.

“We used to go out and do recruitment, but we haven’t had to in a while because the kids in the program bring in other kids.”

– Interview with explorer/cadet program representative

“We send a recruitment documentary to [both] school resource officers throughout the county and school counselors with internship programs.”

– Interview with youth camp/teen academy representative

Example Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment strategies for youth programs include the following:

- Community events, programs
- High school staff (teachers, counselors), college staff (career advisors)
- Mailings, flyers, websites, advertisements
- Open houses, school visits, clubs
- Recruiting unit / staff
- School resource deputies, school resource officers, Reserve Officers’ Training Corps
- Social media
- Word of mouth

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership, staffing, and partners also vary across the different programs we interviewed. Ranks of law enforcement officers leading programs included officers or deputies, sergeants, lieutenants, and captains. School career programs tend to be led by administrators or principals.

Among the programs whose staff we interviewed, there are no clear patterns in staffing, except in school career programs where teachers and instructors lead, facilitate, and teach courses. Explorer/cadet program staff includes officers who run or participate in the program as part of their regular duties within a particular division or unit or as a side or collateral duty in addition to their regular work. Youth camps may also draw support personnel from different parts of the state. For three of the programs whose staff we interviewed, staff are paid on overtime (or through a combination of overtime and compensatory time in lieu of overtime). Overall, these programs were creative with staffing, mixing volunteers from agencies and their communities, officers from surrounding regions, and special units.

“Usually, officers would do it on their day off; it would very rarely be a working officer who could walk away for a few hours for a class. The staffing is more of an issue now, because we are having budget cuts.”

– Interview with youth camp/teen academy representative

The police-led programs whose staff we interviewed tend to recruit staff on the basis of personality. Seven programs specifically mentioned a key trait as being not only the ability to work with youth but also the desire to do so. Other desirable traits described across program types included being amicable, outgoing, compassionate, and understanding and having the ability to make connections.

Example Staff Qualifications

Staff for a youth camp should possess the following:

- Experience working with youth
- Ability to interact well with young people
- Passion
- Good citizenship
- Teaching ability
- Understanding of and experience in law enforcement

The youth law enforcement experience programs whose staff we interviewed partner with a range of different organizations to implement their programs. School career programs rely on partnerships with the local police department or multiple law enforcement agencies to support their needs. Explorer/cadet programs often partner with groups of law enforcement agencies working together; these police partnerships allow programs to host or support events and programs across multiple areas, provide staffing coverage for different activities, and have guest speakers or visits. Outside law enforcement organizations also help to fund the programs, whether through grants from private organizations or support from law enforcement foundations or unions. Explorer/cadet programs also partner with other groups in the community, including the health department, public schools, scouting organizations, and ministries. These partnerships sometimes offer funding support but more often provide ways youth can be involved in the community. In addition, colleges provide some programs with space and educational activities. Finally, some standalone programs rely only on the police department itself to operate.

Performance monitoring, quality improvement, and outcomes

Many programs lack approaches for measuring their success. For example, eight programs whose staff we interviewed did not provide information on an official metric for success or

said such a metric did not exist. These programs instead tend to gauge success based on participant numbers and feedback. School career programs, on the other hand, tend to measure program success by student test performance, attendance, and placement in continuing education or the military. Similarly, few of the youth law enforcement experience programs whose staff we interviewed have formal quality improvement efforts. However, several collect feedback more informally, including having former cadets-turned-officers provide input on the program and how it can be improved, soliciting information from parents, or making changes based on youth reviews and feedback.

“It has been an excellent feeder program for my agency. Some of my original explorers are now my seasoned deputies, one is a sergeant, some are field officers, and one is in communications.”

– Interview with explorer/cadet program representative

While programs have a wide range of goals, many function as recruitment channels for their own or other law enforcement agencies, particularly internship and pipeline programs. Other key outcomes across the program categories include connecting with young people; educating young people about the law enforcement profession; and instilling positive values and skills for the future such as leadership, community service, and professionalism.

“The overall goal is to get these students out into the world and out of their shell to see what’s out there and that there are people who will help them if they want to go into criminal justice / law enforcement. We want to show them that this is a great career and one that people don’t really know much about”

– Interview with youth camp/teen academy representative

“[We have a] Facebook group with graduates. [We] try to follow the participants and keep in touch with them. Have over 21 graduates in the last 10 years that are in PD [police department] jobs, also have kids that go into law, military, etc.”

– Interview with youth camp/teen academy representative

Example Program Outcomes

Outcomes of a youth program should include the following:

- Recruitment and education protocols for the agency
- Leadership/professionalism for participating youth
- Good citizenship for participating youth
- Relationship-building between youth and the agency
- Career engagement for participating agency staff

The programs whose staff we interviewed vary in the number of former youth program participants entering law enforcement, depending somewhat on program size. In many cases, however, this number is not formally tracked but is an estimate based on informal information gathering. For example, the agency hosting one program recently hired two former explorers, and another indicated that at least six former cadets have joined their agency since ageing out of the youth program. For participants exiting school career programs, there is typically a gap between completing high school and being able to start work in law enforcement. The North East Regional Law Enforcement Educational Association (NER-LEEA), an association of explorer/cadet programs, maintains a list of former cadets or explorers who were employed by a law enforcement agency or entered the military or other related service as a measure of success.

Program funding and costs

Youth law enforcement experience programs typically receive funding from various sources. Seven of the programs whose staff we interviewed each has a single source of funding: Five are fully funded by their sponsoring LEA with money allocated for them in the LEA's annual budget, while the other two—both school career programs—are fully funded by their school district or state education funding. Paid internship programs tend to be fully funded by their sponsoring LEA, because the intern salaries are included in the personnel budget.

“It is entirely funded by the cadets. They pay dues each year.”

– Interview with explorer/cadet program representative

Many programs have more than one funding source to address the program's various needs. For example, seven of the programs we interviewed are partially funded by their LEA for events and competitions, equipment and uniforms, or salaries for officers and staff. Three of these programs also are partially funded through donations that come from community members, businesses, or charitable foundations. Six programs are partially funded by the youth themselves through youth-led fundraising events or an annual youth participation fee. Three of the school career programs are partially funded by district or state education funding for staff salaries with supplemental funding through donations for things like student uniforms and equipment. For school career programs, staffing is generally funded by the school system with additional funding for equipment and other materials coming from federal funds.

“We receive all of our state funds in one lump sum and built into that we receive funds from the district CTE and magnet school's department. Other than that, all of the funds come directly from the school district, and they sometimes receive grants that trickle down to us.”

– Interview with school career program representative

For non-school programs, total annual program costs ranged from \$5,000 to \$125,000 a year depending on the type and size of the program. These program costs vary each year depending on which activities are offered and what competitions, equipment, and travel opportunities are made available. Costs per youth served are generally difficult for these programs to calculate.

Other topics

Effects of COVID-19 pandemic

Most changes reported due to the COVID-19 pandemic were temporary. Eight of the programs shut down all activities at the start of the pandemic, with most of these being able to restart their activities shortly thereafter. Eight other programs moved to online meetings and activities, with most then slowly reopening in person with COVID-19 safety measures and policies in place. Program leaders found that online activities were challenging to implement, preferring to work with youth in person. Recruitment and retention during the pandemic also presented challenges because students lost interest in the program when activities were shut down or implemented online. Only two of the programs we interviewed were still shut down because of the pandemic in the spring of 2022; both had experienced staffing and funding issues that prevented them from restarting.

“A lot of our interactions with the sheriff's office were suspended and we limited the number of guest speakers. As COVID numbers started to decline we had a phased reopening of some of the efforts like the defensive tactics and the guest speakers as well as sending students off-site on training.”

– Interview with school career program representative

“When everything shut down in March 2020 we stopped the program, we didn’t have meetings for the two weeks of shut down. Then we started again virtually because we didn’t want to lose any kids. We were online for about two months and realized that kids were dropping off because they didn’t want to be online after being online in school. In June of 2020, we got permission to bring the kids in person outside. We would meet underneath the parking deck. We did that throughout summer 2020 and in fall 2020 we did hybrid with half the kids inside and half the kids online for meetings and would rotate which kids came in person.”

– Interview with explorer/cadet program representative

Only a few programs had widespread issues with staff retention and recruitment related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The programs with staff vacancies were actively seeking to fill them but had found a shortage of staff available during the pandemic. One program had core staff in place, but these staff members had less time to dedicate to the youth program during the pandemic because they were pulled into other staffing assignments related to the COVID-19 pandemic. One fully staffed program was unable to offer certain training opportunities and lectures because it could not find guest speakers.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had some effects on program funding and sustainability. A few programs experienced challenges obtaining funding during the pandemic, largely because it was more difficult to secure donations and departmental support for these programs while they were not fully operational; one program has not been operational since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic because of staffing challenges and difficulty securing departmental funding. COVID-19 affected some programs’ youth membership in ways that challenged their sustainability. For example, one program saw a drop in program membership during the

pandemic because students were bored by online instruction. Once in-person activities resumed, membership improved but has not yet reached pre-pandemic levels.

“We saw a drop in terms of membership during COVID but now that we got back into in-person, and we meet every week its better. One week is class and another week is tactical exercises, so the students don’t get bored sitting around.”

– Interview with explorer/cadet program representative

Efforts to modify programs to increase diversity

Many program leaders are making efforts to increase participant diversity or to reach at-risk youth. Eight of the program leaders describe their programs as committed to diversity and want to involve youth from different backgrounds. Program staff cited difficulties recruiting youth of color, largely stemming from a lack of diversity in their communities or lack of interest in law enforcement among youth of color. School career programs have specific strategies for recruiting a more diverse enrollment, including hiring officers of color who are representative of the student body and conducting outreach activities where staff have the opportunity to connect with youth in communities of color.

“We have had a diverse group to a point in some years. But we are not in a diverse county, there are some African American and Latino individuals in our area but there isn’t a large group of individuals to draw from.”

– Interview with internship program representative

4. Example Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs

In this section, we provide detailed descriptions of eight example youth law enforcement experience programs to guide those interested in implementing a similar program. We selected these eight programs from the 18 that participated in our informational interviews based on information provided during the interviews, public-facing sources such as agency websites, technical advisory group (TAG) meeting discussions, and additional documentation provided to the research team. (See appendix, section “Identification of Example Programs” for more details on our approach to selecting which programs to highlight.) The eight example programs represent different sizes of law enforcement agency (LEA) over a geographic range from California to Connecticut and reflect the different program types that are available.

For each program listed in table 2, we provide a summary of their goals and history, program model, youth recruitment and enrollment, leadership staffing and partners, performance monitoring and outcomes, and funding costs and sustainability. The exception is the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) pipeline program where we

instead describe the different components of the pipeline. For each example program, we also provide contact information under *Program Information* so that those who are interested can directly contact the program to find out additional information.

Table 2. Example youth law enforcement experience programs

PROGRAM TYPE	EXAMPLE PROGRAMS
Explorer/cadet	Dodge County Sheriff’s Office Cadet Program (WI) Danbury Police Cadets (CT) Leon County Sheriff’s Office Law Enforcement Exploring (FL)
Internship	Charles County Sheriff’s Office Police Cadet Program (MD)
Youth camp / teen academy	Westchester Youth Police Academy (NY)
School career	Veteran’s Tribute Career & Technical Academy, Law Enforcement Program (NV) Tulsa Technology Center, Criminal Justice Investigations (OK)
Pipeline	Los Angeles Police Department (CA)

Explorer/cadet program: Dodge County Sheriff's Office Cadet Program

Program information

Program type: Cadet Program

Managing LEA: Dodge County (Wisconsin)
Sheriff's Office

Website: Dodge County SO Cadet Program,
<https://www.co.dodge.wi.gov/departments/departments-p-z/sheriff/community-programs/sheriff-cadets>

Address: 124 West Street, Juneau, WI 53039

Phone number: 920-386-3726

Goals and history

Goals. The goal of the program is to “foster better relationships between law enforcement and youth.” The program wants to instill leadership skills and foster personal development of the cadets. Program leaders focus on teaching cadets “responsibility and how to act as professionals,” instilling the same values in the cadets as they do in officers.

History. The program was created to help build relationships between youth and sheriff's officers in Dodge County, Wisconsin. The program was originally a Law Enforcement Explorer model before switching to the Public Safety Cadet model in 2014. Through time, the program has grown to serve as a feeder program for the sheriff's office, with former cadets securing positions in the agency and assisting with the implementation of the cadet program.

Program model

Target population. Youth aged 14–21 who are interested in a career in law enforcement, unsure about their career goals, or need leadership skills.

Structure. Cadets meet twice a month for two hours year-round, participate in monthly community service events, and train for state law enforcement competitions. Cadets are advised by sheriff's deputies who lead law enforcement trainings related to physical fitness, traffic stops, and crime scene investigations. The cadets have a command structure in which cadets start as deputies and have opportunities to advance to sergeant, lieutenant, and captain.

Youth recruitment and enrollment

Approach to recruitment. The program recruits cadets through its own Facebook page and the sheriff's office's main Facebook page. Parents and youth who are interested in the cadet program are encouraged to follow both pages to receive updates and program information.

Enrollment. An average of 10–15 youth are enrolled in the program per year.

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership and staff. The program is run by Dodge County sheriff's deputies. Each year, a deputy is chosen as lead and three deputies are usually selected to assist. Deputies ask to be assigned to the program based on their interest in mentoring and advising youth and are assigned based on their ability to work with youth in a teaching role. Because it is a cadet-run program, the deputies serve in a supervisory role. Most program activities such as meetings, community service events, and trainings are run by the cadets.

Partners. Officers from neighboring law enforcement agencies assist with the implementation of the program. The cadets partner with local nonprofit organizations for community service events and assist by directing traffic at community events.

Performance monitoring and outcomes

Performance monitoring. The program advisors monitor each cadet's progress through observations at competitions and talking to community partners about cadets' service and behavior at volunteer events.

Outcomes. The program does not formally measure program outcomes but estimates that about 40–50 percent of cadets pursue a career in law enforcement.

Funding, costs, and sustainability

Funding. This program is funded solely by the cadets. Cadets pay a fee upon joining the program and pay \$25 dues each year. Funding for competitions and other events comes from fundraising events hosted by the cadets.

Annual cost. Annual costs for this program vary based on planned activities and competitions for the year. Annually, the program pays a fee to the national Public Safety Cadet

organization and spends about \$150 on cadet uniforms. These costs are covered by the cadets' annual dues. Costs for competitions and events vary and are dependent on the success of cadets' fundraising efforts.

Sustainability. Program leaders believe the program will continue to be sustainable because the cadets have demonstrated their dedication to the program, consistently led successful fundraising efforts to cover costs and expenses, and maintained enrollment.

Additional information

Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program cancelled several meetings until restrictions loosened enough for them to meet in person. Prior to 2020, the cadets had led a successful fundraiser which secured enough funds to sustain activities throughout the pandemic.

Explorer/cadet program: Danbury Police Cadets

Program information

Program type: Cadet Program

Managing LEA: Danbury (Connecticut)
Police Department

Website: Danbury Police Cadets,
<http://danburypoliceexplorers.org/home/>

Address: 375 Main Street, Danbury CT 06810

Email: danburypolicecadets@gmail.com

Goals and history

Goals. The goal of the program is to turn cadets into leaders who are active in community service. It is a leadership development program that aims to foster leadership skills and allow cadets to grow personally and professionally.

History. The Danbury Police Cadet program was established in the late 1960s as a Law Enforcement Explorer program. In the 2007, the program became dually registered as Explorers and Cadets. In 2019, the program joined the Public Safety Cadet program and did not renew its registration with the Explorers in 2020. It fully transitioned to a cadet program

under the North East Regional Law Enforcement Educational Association (NERLEEA) in 2020 while maintaining a relationship with the Public Safety Cadets.

Program model

Target population. Youth ages 13–20 who are interested in joining.

Structure. Cadets meet weekly for three hours year-round to go over upcoming events, conduct uniform inspections, participate in physical fitness trainings, and attend law enforcement classes led by local officers. Cadets are required to attend 70 percent of meetings to maintain membership. The program has a rank structure that encourages cadets to become leaders in the group and advance from cadet to cadet chief. The program uses the Basic Essential Skills Training Criteria (BEST) to help youth prepare to join the group. During their first 8–10 weeks of membership, cadets attend the BEST program, where they learn basic law enforcement procedures, rank structure, and how to direct traffic. Cadets also participate in community events where they obtain community service hours for doing crowd control and directing traffic.

Youth recruitment and enrollment

Approach to recruitment. The program recruits mostly through word of mouth, with established cadets recommending the program to their peers and providing information to youth who demonstrate interest during volunteer events. The program also hosts an open house twice a year to provide interested youth with information about the program, advertises the open house on Facebook, and posts updates about cadets' activities throughout the year.

Enrollment. About 22 cadets were added to the program during the 2021–2022 school year. The program averaged 25 explorers during the 1990s and 2000s. When the Danbury Police Department opened its new building in 2009, enrollment dramatically increased. In 2010, enrollment had doubled to more than 50 cadets, and by 2020 the program had 150 registered cadets. In 2020 enrollment fell by half because of two factors: COVID-19 and changes in public sentiment toward police nationally. The program currently has about 100 cadets registered.

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership and staff. The program is led by a Danbury Police Department sergeant and staffed by about six other officers who serve as advisors. Officers participate in the program while they are on duty and receive compensation in timed leave when they work off duty. The program also invites civilian advisors (often youth who have aged out of the program) and officers from other departments to lead trainings and classes.

Partners. NERLEEA is the program's main partner. NERLEEA hosts regional law enforcement competitions and events such as an overnight summer law enforcement police academy where cadets participate in law enforcement trainings and courses. In addition, the local program takes part in events hosted by the national Public Safety Cadet program.

Performance monitoring and outcomes

Performance monitoring. The program tracks each cadet's hours of training and community service.

Outcomes. The program does not have a specific metric to measure overall performance and success, but NERLEEA has a website that lists former cadets involved with the group and where they are in their careers.

Funding, costs, and sustainability

Funding. Program labor costs are covered by the Danbury Police Department. The cadets pay an application fee of \$35 and an initial registration fee of \$300 in their first year, which covers additional operational costs. There is also a \$150 deposit for the cadet uniform, which is refunded when cadets return the uniform on leaving the program. There are no participant fees after the first year; these costs are supported by fundraising events. Cadets' costs to attend competitions and trainings are mitigated by how much fundraising and community service hours they individually contribute. They also accept donations when they assist at community events.

Annual cost. The annual cost to the agency is approximately \$50,000 per year.

Sustainability. The cadet program has not experienced issues related to funding or recruitment that would impact program sustainability.

Additional information

Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, the program shut down for two weeks and then resumed activities virtually. In June 2020, the program switched to a hybrid model with cadets alternating between virtual and outdoor in-person instruction. Cadets resumed meeting fully in person in 2021. The program also moved away from traditional community service activities to volunteer with the health department at COVID testing sites. Bilingual cadets were able to assist with translation at intake for COVID-19 testing sites.

Explorer/cadet program: Leon County Sheriff's Office Law Enforcement Exploring

Program information

Program type: Explorer

Managing LEA: Leon County (Florida) Sheriff's Office

Website: Leon County Sheriff's Office | Explorers, <https://www.leoncountysos.com/citizen-center/resources/explorers>

Address: 2825 Municipal Way, Tallahassee, FL 32304

Phone number: 850-606-3300

Goals and history

Goals. The goals of the program are to help youth develop leadership skills and abilities and to serve as a recruitment source for the sheriff's office.

History. The program was established in the 1960s. Leon County also has a long-established school resource program, and the county has consistently provided support for youth programs like the Law Enforcement Exploring program.

Program model

Target population. Youth between the ages of 14 and 21 with an interest in law enforcement.

Structure. Explorers meet twice a month for check-ins and law enforcement trainings by sworn officers in areas such as traffic stops, crime scenes, firearms, active shooters, public speaking, leadership training, community service, and other topics. Explorers are encouraged to perform community service, such as assisting with parking and logistics at community events, and to participate in law enforcement events, such as serving on the honor guard for memorials. Each summer, explorers attend a three-week academy, which includes a 40-hour firearm training block where they learn gun safety and receive training to prepare them for firearms competitions. Explorers also have opportunities to compete against other posts at the regional, state, and national levels. Explorers are required to maintain a 2.0 grade-point average and a clean school disciplinary record.

Youth recruitment and enrollment

Approach to recruitment. The program recruits through outreach from school resource deputies who connect with students interested in law enforcement. The deputies also invite youth enrolled in the high school Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) programs to participate. The program also hosts an open house for rising ninth-graders, participates in a yearly mailing campaign to advertise the program in the schools, and runs advertisements on the school news stations.

Enrollment. An average of about 20–24 explorers are enrolled in the program per year.

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership and staff. The program is run by full-time school resource deputies hired by the Leon County Sheriff's Office, who take on these duties in addition to their regular duties.

These advisors are overseen by a sergeant who also works full-time as an in-school resource for the department. All officer deputies are fully compensated for their work while on duty and earn overtime if they work extra hours. Staff are responsible for leading law enforcement trainings and scenarios, serve as the main point of contact for the explorers, and schedule their activities. Additional law enforcement officers occasionally teach lessons based on their law enforcement assignments and expertise.

Partners. The explorers' competitive pistol team receives money from Midway USA Competitions, which goes into an endowment. The explorers use 5 percent of that endowment each year for program implementation and expenses. The explorer program also partners with local businesses and community groups, who assist with program fundraising and receive support from the program for community events, and with other departments in the area that have similar programs to plan and conduct competitions and other joint activities.

Performance monitoring and outcomes

Performance monitoring. No information about performance monitoring for this program was provided.

Outcomes. The program tries to stay in touch with former explorers to track those who have become employees of the sheriff's office, or outside law enforcement agencies or entered the military.

Funding, costs, and sustainability

Funding. The program has reoccurring funding allocated from the sheriff's office budget in the amount of \$13,000 per year. This money is used for uniforms, equipment, travel, training, office space rental, and program fees. The program also purchases liability insurance, which the sheriff's office covers in addition to the annual budget allocation. The program obtains additional funding through fundraisers and donations.

Annual cost. The annual cost is \$5,000 a year for basic expenses like uniforms and equipment, with additional costs depending on planned events and activities for the program year. The sheriff's office pays 100 percent of explorer's expenses, including their charter, memberships, uniforms, and training.

Additional information

Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic. The program was shut down from March to August 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the program did not participate in meetings or recruitment activities. The program resumed for the 2020–2021 school year.

Internship program: Charles County Sheriff's Office Cadet Program

Program information

Program type: Cadet Program

Managing LEA: Charles County (Maryland) Sheriff's Office

Website: Charles County SO Cadet Program, <https://www.ccsso.us/community/youth-outreach/cadet-program/>

Address: PO Box 189, La Plata, MD 20646

Phone number: 301-609-6417

Goals and history

Goals. The goal of the program is for cadets to learn and prepare for a career in law enforcement.

History. The program was established in 2000 as an internship program for college students interested in law enforcement. The cadet program is an extension of Charles County High School's criminal justice program. Because of increasing difficulty in recruiting for law enforcement positions, and to become more accessible for young people interested in becoming police officers, the program dropped its college requirement and made internships available to high school students.

Program model

Target population. High school seniors and part-time or full-time college students interested in a career in law enforcement.

Structure. Cadets are paid \$19–\$20 an hour and work a total of 24 hours a week in various departments throughout the sheriff's office; they are assigned to assist the criminal investigations unit, crime lab, corrections, and patrol divisions based on the department's needs. Cadets are also responsible for morning mail runs to district stations throughout the agency and help with records management. Cadets receive in-service trainings on active shooter scenarios and assist with firearm trainings for the police academy. Cadets also have a weekly physical fitness class to prepare them for the police academy. Cadets are encouraged to stay in the program until they are eligible to apply for the corrections or police academy (up to a maximum of three years).

Youth recruitment and enrollment

Approach to recruitment. Charles County High School has a criminal justice program, which is the main recruitment tool for the cadet program. Students who are enrolled in the high school course are encouraged to apply to the program if they are interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. The high school also promotes the program via online ads and encourages cadets to bring friends who are interested in law enforcement into the program.

Enrollment. The Police Cadet Program accepts a maximum of five students into the program at a time. Currently there is only one student enrolled, but the program is actively reviewing applications to bring in another two or three cadets.

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership and staff. The Charles County Sheriff's Office's Assistant Director of Training leads the program. The cadets are assigned to the training office and report daily to the commander of the training division to receive their tasks and assignments.

Partners. No information about other partners was provided.

Performance monitoring and outcomes

Performance monitoring. The sheriff's office conducts employee performance evaluations of the cadets; the cadets are evaluated by their supervisors and confer with the assistant commander of training to discuss the evaluation and how they can improve. All cadets also have an exit interview before they leave the program, where they can provide the sheriff's office with feedback on ways to improve the program.

Outcomes. The training division looks at the yearly retention rates for cadets and estimates that about 70 percent of cadets stay in law enforcement after leaving the program (based on word of mouth and knowledge of former cadets who are employed by the sheriff's office).

Funding, costs, and sustainability

Funding. This program is fully funded by the sheriff's office, which has an authorized salary set aside for a maximum of five cadets per year. Cadet uniforms are paid by the quartermaster's office, and fleet managers cover the cadets' vehicle costs.

Annual cost. On average, the sheriff's office pays about \$125,000 a year for the wages of three to five cadets.

Sustainability. Recently, the long-term sustainability of the program has been threatened by a lack of students interested in law enforcement; the program has found it more difficult to identify recruits because of increasingly negative views of law enforcement held by high school- and college-aged youth. While cadet recruitment has suffered, the sheriff's office has the funding and staff support needed to sustain the program moving forward.

Additional information

Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic. The program operated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic without shutting down. At the beginning of the pandemic, the sheriff's office modified the cadets' work schedules to avoid face-to-face interaction between cadets. Cadets did not have any shifts together and were required to wear masks while at work.

Youth Camp / Teen Academy: Westchester Youth Police Academy

Program information

Program type: Youth Police Academy

Managing LEA: Dobbs Ferry (New York)
Police Department

Website: Westchester Youth Police Academy,
[https://www.dobbsferry.com/police-department/
pages/youth-academy](https://www.dobbsferry.com/police-department/pages/youth-academy)

Address: 112 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

Phone number: 914-693-5500

Goals and history

Goals. The goal is to give participants a background introduction to policing and law enforcement. The program aims to create an environment where individuals can learn more about criminal justice and receive well-rounded education about the different careers available in law enforcement.

History. The program was established as a replacement for a high school internship program. The internship ran all summer, but the department struggled to find engaging work activities for the interns, who were only able to do clerical work. As a result, the department partnered with other local law enforcement agencies in Westchester County to create a six-week Youth Police Academy offering courses and training to give students exposure to law enforcement work.

Program model

Target population. High school seniors who are graduating and interested in pursuing criminal justice in college or a career in policing.

Structure. The program is a six-week, full-time program for high school seniors in Westchester County who have an interest in criminal justice and law enforcement. The program is a collaborative effort between county municipal police departments and high schools. Students attend the program Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. and receive training

in physical fitness, defense tactics, and criminal investigations. Students receive college-level criminal justice instruction on New York state laws and can earn up to three college credits during the program. Students also participate in ride-alongs across the county and take trips to criminal justice facilities, courts, prisons, forensic labs, and the 9/11 museum.

Youth recruitment and enrollment

Approach to recruitment. Youth Academy students created a recruitment documentary that the Dobbs Ferry Police Department has sent to local school resources officers, school counselors, and internship programs to distribute to students for recruitment.

Enrollment. Average enrollment for the program is 40 students per year.

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership and staff. The program is run by a coordinator from one of the partner agencies, chosen on the basis of availability. The officer assigned as program coordinator is responsible for day-to-day activities; other leading officers are responsible for attendance, communication with schools, and physical fitness trainings. Still other law enforcement officers work in supporting roles supervising the students throughout the six-week program. Officers who work for the program are assigned to the program full-time for the six weeks it runs. These officers are youth oriented, with most being juvenile or Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) officers or having had a prior assignment to a youth program.

Partners. The program serves youth throughout Westchester County. Officers from neighboring police departments in the county are involved in planning the program and serve as instructors.

Performance monitoring and outcomes

Performance monitoring. The program collects reviews from the students, which are used to assess the quality of the program. Program leaders also observe classes and demonstrations to see if students are engaged and receiving helpful information.

Outcomes. The program has a Facebook page for graduating students, where students can continue to post about their careers after attending the program. To date, the program has had 21 graduates over 10 years who continued on to police department jobs. The program tracks the information that former students provide on the Facebook page or through word of mouth.

Funding, costs, and sustainability

Funding. Officers who work for the program are assigned full-time for the six-week program, with the department fully covering their salaries. Otherwise, the program funding comes from donations and student fees. The high school parent-teacher association (PTA) and the Police Association both donate money for program implementation costs each year. Students also pay a small fee (\$50–75) to cover uniform t-shirts and hats. Pace University also donates space to house the program and provides students with criminal justice certificates for free.

Annual cost. No information about annual cost was provided.

Sustainability. The program has experienced some challenges staffing the program. Sometimes assigned officers have to step away from the position to cover their other work responsibilities. Certain students have also had trouble covering the costs of program fees, but this issue has not greatly impacted sustainability because donors have provided scholarships to assist students who have trouble affording the program. The program is viewed as sustainable in the long term because of its support from local police departments. The program also serves a diverse group of students, which is a positive for the police department.

Additional information

Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic. The program shut down from 2020 to 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the program includes students from multiple school districts and locations throughout the county, program staff did not feel that it would be safe to mix so many students from different areas. In 2022, Pace University was still not hosting outside events because of COVID-19. The program plans to restart in the summer of 2023.

School Career program: Veteran’s Tribute Career & Technical Academy Law Enforcement Program

Program information

Program type: School career program

Managing educational institution: Veterans Tribute Career & Technical Academy (VTCTA)

Website: Veterans Tribute Career & Technical Academy,
<https://www.vtcta.org/apps/contact/>

Address: 2531 Vegas Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89106

Phone number: 702-799-4710

Goals and history

Goals. The overarching goal of the program is to prepare each student to make excellent choices for attending college and selecting future careers by providing a realistic idea of what a law enforcement career entails (including the psychological requirements), exposure to the job responsibilities, the skills and knowledge required to be successful in a public safety career, and experience in a structured learning environment.

History. VTCTA opened in 2009, with 350 high school freshman and sophomore students. Since then, the school has grown to 850 students in all four grades. Initially supported by the Las Vegas (Nevada) Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD), Las Vegas City and County Fire Departments, and local governments, it operates as a high school within the Clark County School District. VTCTA is the only school in Nevada focusing on preparing students for careers in public service and safety. The school’s name, Veterans Tribute, was selected to recognize those who have provided a public service by serving the country and serve as an example for the students as they consider public service careers.

Program model

Target population. High school–age youth eligible to attend a public high school. Students from anywhere in Clark County can attend.

Structure. VTCTA is a magnet high school with seven career programs: Law Enforcement, Forensic Science, EMS, Emergency Dispatch, Cyber, Forensics, and Criminal Justice. In

ninth grade, students take a general public safety course exposing them to each program area and then select the program they will enter the next year. Students who choose to major in law enforcement have one required major course in 10th through 12th grades and are encouraged to minor in criminal justice, forensic science, or 911 dispatch. In addition to coursework, students must complete 25 community service hours per academic year and participate in field trips, job shadowing, and paid or unpaid internships in the greater Las Vegas community. These activities are designed to help students gain self-confidence, leadership skills, and personal understanding through their accomplishments while reaching out to help others. Parents are also encouraged to complete 15 hours of community service to serve as a model for their children.

Youth recruitment and enrollment

Approach to recruitment. VTCTA has a dedicated recruiter who visits every middle school in the district between August and December, doing presentations to all eighth graders. VTCTA also hosts an open house to introduce interested students to the teachers, current students, and partners. The recruitment pitch emphasizes that the students will see law enforcement officers on a regular basis and have experiences that will help them decide on a career path.

Enrollment. VTCTA averages 800–850 students in grades 9–12.

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership and staff. VTCTA’s principal has overall responsibility for all seven programs, while an assistant principal supervises instruction. A social studies teacher serves as the full-time law enforcement teacher. The teacher builds relationships with the local police departments to bring in subject matter experts to share first-hand knowledge and training. Otherwise, the students attend regular high school courses and electives.

Partners. VTCTA partners with LEAs such as the LVMPD, Henderson Police Department, Nevada Department of Public Safety, Nevada State Police, and the Clark County School District Police Department, as well as security organizations from the casinos, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI),

and other federal agencies. VTCTA also partners with two explorer/cadet programs: LVMPD Law Enforcement Explorers Programs and North LVMPD Law Enforcement Explorers Program.

Performance monitoring and outcomes

Performance monitoring. For each student in the law enforcement program, VTCTA tracks grades and results from the final end-of-program exam and a workplace readiness performance test. Skills assessments are also provided by instructors from the public safety agencies. At the end of each year, students write an essay about the program with ideas for improvement.

Outcomes. VTCTA looks at overall graduation rates, college acceptance rates, and employment after graduation but has found that tracking graduates is difficult and time-consuming. Information on those going on to public safety careers is difficult to obtain and primarily anecdotal.

Funding, costs, and sustainability

Funding. VTCTA receives funding from the state and the Clark County School District's Career and Technical Education (CTE) office and magnet school department, which pays for the secretary, recruiter, and community liaison. When the state or district receives various grants, some of the funds are distributed to VTCTA. VTCTA's partners also contribute in a variety of ways, including funding internships, technology, equipment, and scholarships.

Annual cost. For VTCTA, the cost of the law enforcement instructor and supplies averages \$150,000 per year. Students are charged an annual fee of \$100.

Sustainability. VTCTA's funding has been stable since inception, with no expectations that this will change.

Additional information

Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic limited the hands-on experiences and internship opportunities that are critical to the program. During the pandemic, staff and partners reevaluated the curriculum, developed more effective approaches, and decided on learning priorities.

Tulsa Technology Center Criminal Justice Program

Program information

Program type: School career program

Managing educational institution:
Tulsa Technology Center (Tulsa Tech)

Website: Tulsa Technology Center,
<http://www.tulsatech.edu/>

Address: 3850 N. Peoria, Tulsa, OK 74106

Phone number: 918-828-5000

Goals and history

Goals. The goal of the program is to equip students with the knowledge and skills to be competitive applicants for law enforcement and related public safety positions.

History. Oklahoma operates 29 technology centers with 59 campuses. While Tulsa has six campus locations, only the Peoria campus offers the criminal justice program, which began around 2011. Technology center districts are accredited by the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education and the Oklahoma State Department of Education; in addition, the programs offered by Tulsa Tech are approved by the United States Department of Education.

Program model

Target population. High school seniors and juniors in the Tulsa area.

Structure. Students are bussed to the center from their home high school to take targeted courses for half of the school day. Criminal Justice consists of two programs that each meet three hours per day, five days per week: Criminal Justice Practical Law, taken the junior year of high school, is a survey program that covers the U.S. criminal justice system, police procedures such as criminal and accident investigations, and evidence gathering; Criminal Justice Investigations, taken the senior year of high school, covers the fundamentals of criminal investigation and develops skills for arrest procedures, serving warrants, and detention. Students also have the opportunity to earn industry certifications, including 911 dispatch, CPR

and first aid, jail standards, and unarmed security guard. The program is paramilitary in structure and requires each student to have a physical; emphasis is placed on physical training and defensive tactics meant to prepare students for successful entry into a law enforcement academy. Uniforms are required and include shirts, cargo pants, and boots.

Youth recruitment and enrollment

Approach to recruitment. Tulsa Technology Center has career advisors assigned to high schools in the Tulsa area to advise students on high-demand, high-skill, high-wage careers and help them complete the competitive application process to attend their desired program. Career advisors also participate in community outreach efforts. In addition to a physical, interested students are required to visit the technology center to tour their program of interest and meet the instructors. There is also a targeted outreach program for Hispanic and Latinx youth; a goal of the Tulsa public safety agencies is to ensure demographic enrollment numbers accurately reflect the local communities served. Because of industry demand, targeted recruitment of bilingual students is also a priority.

Enrollment. Criminal Justice Investigations has an enrollment of 40 students (all seniors). Criminal Justice Practical Law has an enrollment of 40 students (all juniors).

Leadership, staffing, and partners

Leadership and staff. Campus administration is responsible for oversight and general program supervision. Program faculty comprises two instructors with previous law enforcement experience who provide daily classroom and lab instruction and leadership development. The Tulsa County (Oklahoma) Sheriff's Office, Tulsa Police Department, and other public safety agencies also provide assistance; for example, the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office assigns a deputy to the program for a limited time to help teach industry-specific content. Other agencies assign experts for specific sessions as requested.

Partners. Tulsa Tech's Criminal Justice program partners with the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office and Tulsa Police Department. The Tulsa County Sheriff's Office provides hands-on training

at the David L. Moss Detention Center. For graduates interested in a career in public safety, the sheriff's office also offers employment opportunities as unarmed detention officers at this facility.

Performance monitoring and outcomes

Performance monitoring. Follow-up data are collected annually to review enrollment, retention, completion, and placement of students enrolled in Tulsa Tech's Criminal Justice programs.

Outcomes. Tulsa Tech tracks the percentage of students who achieve industry-related employment, enroll in college, or join the military; percentage of students earning one or more of the industry certifications offered; and percentage of graduates employed in public safety.

Funding, costs, and sustainability

Funding. Primary funding comes from the local level through Tulsa County property taxes; additional funding is provided from the state through the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education. Tulsa Tech does not incur any costs associated with staffing provided by the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office or support from other public safety organizations.

Annual cost. Tuition and textbooks are provided at no cost to participating high school students.

Sustainability. The program is sustained by public funds provided through local ad valorem taxes and state funding provided by the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education.

Additional information

Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the pandemic, much of the hands-on training and the required visit to the technology center by prospective students were curtailed because of safety considerations. As local conditions allowed, the program did a phased reopening for some activities and then returned to normal operations in 2022.

Pipeline Program: Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD)

Overview

The Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) pipeline program has five unique youth law enforcement experience programs: Junior Police Academies, LAPD Cadets, Police Academy Magnet Schools (PAMS), Police Orientation and Preparation Program (POPP), and Associate Community Officer Program (ACOP). These programs, which include both school career and non-school programs, are connected in sequence. While youth do not have to follow the sequence or participate in all five, together these programs provide a pathway for youth into a public safety career.

Junior Police Academies

Program type: Cadet Program

Managing educational institutions: Burbank and Mulholland Middle Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

Websites: Mullholland Junior Police Academy (MJPA), <https://www.mulhollandms.org/mjpa-program-description>, and Burbank Junior Police Academy (BJPA), <https://www.lbmsbears.com/magnet>

Goals. The goal of MJPA is to support students in achieving academic excellence by understanding the importance of integrity, commitment, responsibility, self-discipline, confidence, and pride. The goals of BJPA are to create an academic community of lifelong learners, offer students a rigorous interdisciplinary curriculum, and provide students with hands-on experiences.

Program model. Both programs target sixth through eighth grade students in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) who maintain a 2.0 average. Junior Police Academy Cadets are required to take classes in the core academic content areas (English, math, science, history), a physical training/conditioning program, and grade-specific electives (e.g., environmental forensics, investigative communication, crime scene investigations). There is also a community service requirement. Students wear a uniform.

Recruitment and enrollment. Students and parents apply to MJPA and BJPA the fall prior to the beginning of the sixth grade school year and participate in intensive orientations for parents and cadets. MJPA also hosts a camp to help its incoming students acclimate to the police academy structure. MJPA averages 350 students per year, while BJPA averages 100.

Leadership, staffing, and partners. MJPA cadets provide their own leadership, with cadet officers and squad leaders who are responsible for organizing the classroom sessions and providing leadership. For BJPA, on-site LAPD officers and the program coordinator appoint officers and squad leaders, who serve as leaders for all classroom and program activities. Partners for both programs include middle school teachers, an LAPD officer, a school police officer from the Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD), and the PAMS program.

Performance monitoring and quality improvement.

Cadets' progress is monitored with a tool that tracks achievement and awards for conduct, community service and academic progress. The programs track the percentage of their eighth graders who join and graduate from a police academy high school.

Funding and costs. Program funding comes primarily from the LAUSD and the magnet school office, with some support from the Boosters and police-related foundations. The primary cost drivers are the salaries of the teachers and LAPD/LAPSD officers.

LAPD Cadets

Program type: Cadet Program

Managing LEA: LAPD

Website: LAPD Cadets, <https://lapdcadets.com/cadets-2/>

Goals. The goal of the program is to provide youth with an opportunity to develop skills in the areas of leadership, academic excellence, ethical and wise decision-making, and community service, and to further their understanding and knowledge of law enforcement as a career.

Program model. Each of the 21 LAPD community police stations, as well as several specialized posts such as the Metropolitan Division or Communications Division, has a cadet program for youth ages 13–20. All new recruits attend an 18-week leadership academy. Those that complete the academy become cadets, meeting weekly for two to three hours for academic, communications, law enforcement skills, and physical training as well as community service.

Recruitment and enrollment. Most recruitment is done through the LAPD districts and specialized divisions. Cadets must have and maintain a 2.5 grade point average, have no serious criminal record, obtain a medical examination, and complete the cadet academy. A total of 341 youth participated in the 2022 Cadet Leadership Academy, with a total of approximately 2,000 cadets in 2022.

Leadership, staffing, and partners. Commanding officers of each district or division are responsible for all aspects of the program, with support from an advisor and youth services officers: sworn or civilian members of the department whose primary duty is to direct and supervise the activities of any official department-sponsored youth program. The cadet program partners with both the PAMS and the two Junior Police Academy programs to reinforce the learning youth receive from the different programs. The University of Southern California and Los Angeles Airport Police both host affiliated cadet posts, and there is a post in partnership with the Gateway YMCA.

Performance monitoring and quality improvement. Each cadet is reviewed every six months with a Cadet Rating Report. The advisor meets with the cadet to review the evaluation and make suggestions for improvement. The program tracks the percent of graduates from the Leadership Academy who become cadets or enter the Police Academy.

Funding and costs. The program is primarily funded through the LAPD budget, with officer salaries representing the primary cost. The program has received some grant funding and donations to provide resources.

Police Academy Magnet Schools (PAMS)

Program type: School career

Managing educational institutions: Banning High School, Fairfax High School, Monroe High School, Reseda Charter High School, San Pedro High School, West Adams High School, and Wilson High School

Website: PAMS,
<https://lapdcadets.com/police-academy-magnet-school/>

Goals. The primary goal of the two Junior Police Academy programs and PAMS is to build positive relationships between teenagers and police, with a secondary goal of recruitment.

Program model. There are six high schools that serve as PAMS within the LAUSD. Each exists as a school within a school and offers a program focused on law enforcement careers with a CTE strand. The ninth through 12th grade curriculum at the different schools typically includes specialized electives, college courses, physical training, and 30 hours a year of community service. Basic academic classes are taught thematically to relate the content to public safety and government. The CTE pathway in most of the PAMS starts with either Introduction to Law Enforcement Careers or Police Science, then Introduction to Criminal Justice, and wraps up with Introduction to Forensic Science.

Recruitment and enrollment. Students apply to the program through the LAUSD Office of Integration, which is responsible for magnet applications and placement. Students who live five miles or farther from the police academy magnet of their choice are provided free bussing. Recruitment is concentrated in the fall but continues throughout the year with school visits and magnet school fairs. The two middle school Junior Police Academy programs serve as the primary recruitment source for the PAMS, but any LAUSD students can apply. Typically, which PAMS a student attends is determined by their location. Total PAMS enrollment across the six high schools is approximately 1,200 students.

Leadership, staffing, and partners. Each PAMS has a program coordinator who oversees all aspects of the programs, including the teachers, counselors, and police officers.

Performance monitoring and quality improvement. To monitor student performance, the programs track attendance rates and exam scores. The programs also track graduation rates and the percentage of graduates going on to law enforcement positions.

Funding and costs. Salaries of teachers are paid by the LAUSD, while officer salaries are paid by the LAPD. Many of the PAMS have additional funding through a federal Career Pathway Grant.

Police Orientation and Preparation Program (POPP)

Program Type: School career

Managing educational institution: Los Angeles Community College District

Website: POPP, <https://poppartc.com/>

Goals. The program goals are to prepare cadets for the moral, ethical, and physical standards of the LAPD, provide them with a two-year Associate for Science for Transfer degree (AST), and prepare graduates for employment opportunities through law enforcement education, training, and certification.

Program model. POPP is the capstone program of the PAMS network. POPP recruits current 12th graders and recent high school graduates aged 17–21 for its two-year associate’s degree program which is offered at two locations (LAPD’s Ahmanson Recruit Training Center and LA Valley College). The program includes physical training led by an LAPD drill instructor.

Recruitment and enrollment. The program primarily recruits students who have participated in the PAMS high school program or the LAPD Cadet program; however, anyone meeting the basic requirements may apply. Approximately 100 students are enrolled in POPP each year.

Leadership, staffing, and partners. The program is led by the POPP coordinator, who works from the Ahmanson Recruit Training Center; academic instruction is provided by professors from West LA College and LA Valley College who typically have prior law enforcement experience. The program partners with the LAPD and LAUSD as well as the Los Angeles Community College District.

Performance monitoring and quality improvement. The program tracks outcomes such as the percentage graduating with degree, the percentage entering the LAPD Academy; and the percentage accepted to a four-year college.

Funding and costs. The California Promise Program provides free tuition for POPP students, with the LA PAMS Foundation and LA Police Foundation providing additional funding as needed.

Associate Community Officer Program (ACOP)

Program type: Internship

Managing LEA: LAPD

Website: ACOP, <https://www.joinlapd.com/acop>

Goals. The program goals are to provide future sworn officers with a paid work opportunity as they complete the lengthy testing and background process for the police academy.

Program model. ACOP provides a paid apprenticeship position for high school graduates who have been accepted to POPP or who are going to college and plan to apply become sworn officers of the LAPD. Associate Community Officers (ACO) work at their local police stations and begin the process of becoming police officers.

Recruitment and enrollment. The majority of ACOP participants are recruited from PAMS or the LAPD Cadet program.

Leadership, staffing, and partners. The program is managed by a LAPD officer and staffed by staff of the various divisions.

Performance monitoring and quality improvement. The program monitors the number of participants, their demographic breakdown, and the percentage entering the police academy.

Funding and costs. The LAPD fully funds the program, with the total yearly cost depending on the number of participants.

5. Implementation Considerations

In this section, we highlight some considerations for those seeking to implement a youth law enforcement experience program.

Recognize the implications of state and local police officer hiring requirements

An increasing focus on the role of police in society has led some states to revisit their standards and requirements for an individual to become a police officer; for example, the 2021 Peace Officers Education and Age Conditions for Employment (PEACE) Act in California increased the minimum hiring age for most state and local peace officers from 18 to 21 years. Further, the education standards in the Act require peace officers to have at least a high school education and complete a certain number of training hours. The PEACE Act also encourages changing the minimum education requirements for employment as a peace officer to require completion of either a new modern policing degree program at the community college level or a bachelor's degree in any discipline (California State Assembly 2022). Such changes in age or education requirements have implications for existing or new youth law enforcement experience programs, especially those where a youth may complete the program at age 18 or younger. This gap between the end of a youth program and the beginning of eligibility for a law enforcement position means that LEAs may lose touch with promising candidates, a risk that underscores the need for such programs to maintain consistent engagement throughout participants' adolescence and into young adulthood.

Understand the importance of pipeline programs

One answer to this gap between high school and eligibility to enter an academy is a pipeline program. These programs offer opportunities for youth to stay connected to LEAs and continue uninterrupted along the path toward a public safety career and for the early and continuous mentoring and engagement with potential candidates.

Further, when high school explorer or cadet programs lose touch with those who age out of or leave their programs, they have a hard time assessing whether the program is successful in leading youth to careers in law enforcement.

Examples of pipeline programs that address the "gap years" include the LAPD's Pipeline Program (see section 4), the Phoenix Police Department Police Cadet Program, and the Baltimore County Police Department Public Safety Cadet Program.

The youth law enforcement experience programs described in this guide all seek to support recruitment efforts by identifying youth who might make good candidates, helping youth gain key skills and decide whether a law enforcement career is something they would like to strive for, and maintaining contact with youth program participants until they are able to apply for a position or to the LEA's academy. Table 3 on page 30 illustrates some

of the key considerations for the development of a pipeline program. Because individual communities and LEAs have different needs, leadership, resources, and goals, table 3 outlines two different scenarios: (1) when an agency has an existing youth law enforcement experience program and would like to connect with other programs to create a pipeline and (2) when an agency would like to start a pipeline program from scratch.

Support the development of approaches for youth recruitment, program staffing, and performance monitoring

In section 3, we described some of the key program features programs that are important for anyone interested in starting or modifying a youth law enforcement experience program.

First, effective recruitment and outreach are critical to the success of youth law enforcement experience programs. Programs should employ a multi-pronged approach that includes social media and word of mouth, with attention given to the overall tone of the messaging. A carefully crafted marketing effort can generate interest from youth, students, and parents and help boost enrollment. As the personnel involved in youth law enforcement experience programs are typically not

marketing or recruitment professionals, it may be worthwhile to explore partnerships and opportunities with people and firms who have expertise in targeted marketing and outreach. Further, since schools play an important role in recruiting youth, programs should collaborate with schools or districts to help identify youth for a program. For example, one internship program noted that a partnership with a high school program has built awareness of policing and criminal justice among students that in turn generates interest in their internship program. Similarly, youth summer camps that develop relationships with high schools and Junior ROTC programs have a ready source for recruiting youth into their program. Across all types of programs, outreach to middle and high schools (and their students) can be an important approach for building interest in both program activities and policing in general. While outreach efforts can take many forms, one effective manner to do this is through conducting presentations and question-and-answer sessions.

Second, because hiring the right program staff or instructors is critical, programs should develop a rigorous and nuanced approach to identifying and selecting program staff. Ideally, program staff should have hands-on experience in

Table 3. Considerations for developing pipeline programs

APPROACH	CONSIDERATION
<p>Connecting with other programs to create a pipeline</p>	<p>Connect with any existing career public safety programs in schools or career and technical centers.</p> <p>Develop formal affiliations with the school career programs, such as joining their advisory boards or providing officers to instruct in certain skill areas.</p> <p>Develop a tracking database and communication plan to provide ongoing connections with youth.</p> <p>Create internship opportunities to maintain contact and ensure youth are prepared for the academy.</p>
<p>Starting from scratch</p>	<p>Connect with any existing career public safety programs in schools or career and technical centers.</p> <p>If no such programs exist, contact the school district’s Career and Technical Education Office about starting a public safety program.</p> <p>Start a LEA-managed program for students in the district.</p> <p>Develop an explorer/cadet program or an internship program.</p>

public safety positions and in working with youth so that they can build effective relationships with a variety of organizations and people. Programs should work to identify staff who believe in the program's goals and are committed to developing meaningful relationships with youth. For school career programs in particular, instructors who have law enforcement knowledge or experience bring a first-hand perspective to the classroom.

Third, programs should develop performance monitoring systems that capture both short- and long-term metrics, track progress, and inform continuous quality improvement efforts. Knowing how well a program meets its goals in the short term and building from there is key to long-term program success. Further, having short-term tracking data such as the number of program participants or graduates to show the effectiveness of a program is especially helpful when there is a change in government or law enforcement leadership or community discussions of funding. Other short-term metrics might include survey data on participant satisfaction or knowledge.

Qualitative data (such as interviews or focus groups) from program and staff and participants can also contribute to an understanding of program progress. This kind of open-ended data can help ensure you capture any unplanned effects of the program—benefits or drawbacks. Qualitative data may also form a significant part of the performance metrics for measuring progress toward certain short-term program goals such as developing leadership, improving professionalism, and humanizing police officers.

To track long-term success metrics, such as the number of graduates pursuing a position in law enforcement or related professions such as forensic science, programs can develop approaches for maintaining contact with former participants.

Finally, agencies and educational institutions developing new law enforcement youth experience programs should reach out to existing programs for support and resources. Talking with or visiting an exemplar program can provide guidance for developing and refining one's own program.

As well as networking with and examining lessons learned from existing youth programs, programs can borrow and learn from similar initiatives outside of criminal justice, such as Junior ROTC and other school-based vocational training.

These comparisons can provide ideas for improving a program's structure, recruiting, or learning techniques and experiences.

Focus on sustainability

Funding for youth law enforcement experience programs is critical to their overall and long-term success. For programs funded by LEA budgets, funding cuts can reduce the resources available to support officer time and pose challenges to supporting a program over the long-term. To maintain support, programs need to align with both LEA leadership and community demands, both of which may change through time.

Getting a firm commitment from the LEA via a memorandum of understanding (MOU) can help ensure the sustained funding and staffing for a program even as leadership changes hands. In contrast, grant-funded programs are generally tied to a grant cycle, while those that rely on fundraising to support operations may have to manage variation in funding from year to year. Both of these scenarios introduce variability and uncertainty that make long-term planning and sustainability challenging.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic poses serious threats to youth law enforcement experience programs in general. Many programs curtailed some or all operations for a length of time starting in 2020, and some are preparing to resume in 2023. However, the pandemic also provides some lessons on sustainability, including how to pivot, restart, or rebuild programs. For example, programs that continued during the pandemic shifted to online programming and learning or incorporated social distancing practices to keep youth engaged with program activities. Other programs took the opportunity to reevaluate what they were doing and why they were doing it. This pause gave them time to ask questions, prioritize, restructure, and then plan what the program would look like once it restarted.

The potential long-term effects of the push for police reform following the murder of George Floyd and the resulting stigma attached to police departments is another factor affecting the sustainability of youth law enforcement experience programs. Future incidents at the national or local level could

Figure 4. Steps for launching a youth law enforcement experience program



further hamper interest and support for these types of programs. During periods of volatility stemming from incidents of police brutality, parents and youth may not want to be involved with law enforcement. Yet the Black Lives Matter movement demonstrated the need to increase diversity and recruitment within LEAs and for LEAs to find ways to connect with youth, and in particular to have discussions around issues of race and racism. Forging these kinds of relationships between youth in the program and LEAs is critical to the ultimate success of youth participants and LEAs.

Overall, youth law enforcement experience programs can play a key role in recruitment of youth and young adults into law enforcement careers. When municipal, county, and state governments support these programs, they can strengthen

community relations in the short term and positively impact officer recruitment in the long term.

Potential for impact

In the future, youth law enforcement experience programs have the potential to play a significant role in recruiting and hiring officers. Some types of program also provide the opportunity to provide youth with training and understanding of critical topics such as use of force and bias. It should be noted that the staff and supervisors from each program highlighted in this guide found their own experience as teachers and mentors in the program to be extremely worthwhile for them personally and professionally—another benefit of youth law enforcement experience programs.

The following steps can help ensure that a youth law enforcement experience program maximizes its impact (figure 4).

The first two steps are identifying the target population and selecting the type of program to be developed. These decisions are interrelated:

For example, if law enforcement or community members want to improve police-community relations, they should target groups that typically have some strain with law enforcement, such as younger teenagers. This decision could then lead to selecting a program type such as explorer programs or summer camps. However, LEAs that want to create a pipeline recruiting sworn officers should target older youth (e.g., ages 18–21) and offer cadet or internship opportunities.

Agencies or schools can identify what type of program works best for them *programmatically* (i.e., what type of program is best suited for the target population, setting, available staff, etc.) and then determine whether they have the expertise to provide instruction to young people of various ages and interests. For example, an explorer/cadet program could be weighed against an internship program, and an agency could then seek to balance factors such as staff experience, budget,

and their intended use of the program (e.g., short-or-long term recruitment effort) in their decision-making process.

The next critical point in the development process is securing funding, with consideration given to the size of the program, the type and use of staff, and resources needed for program activities. As we described in section 3, funding for youth law enforcement experience programs varies greatly, with school career programs more often having dedicated funding from school districts or the state, and explorer programs sometimes charging fees to participate or relying on grants to fund their operations. While figure 4 shows securing funding as a single step, it is likely more of an ongoing consideration across the life of the program and may be revisited as the needs and priorities of the agency and the youth it serves change.

Another critical step in the process is hiring and training staff. Our interviewees reinforced the importance of selecting the right type of person, both in experience and in ability to work with youth. Personnel assigned to or teaching in these programs will likely need time to understand and develop their roles and responsibilities—or, at the very least, time to develop course or training materials. Once some of the internal logistics are in place, the next step is recruitment of participants. This can be done through formal or informal channels but should be appropriate for the target audience (such as recruiting college internship participants through outreach to local criminal justice programs).

The final step—a formal program to monitor results—was somewhat lacking in our review of youth law enforcement programs. Where LEAs hire directly from their own programs, results can be more easily measured, but often metrics such

as improvements in perceptions of police or employment in the criminal justice system can be more challenging to track. However, formalizing an approach for measuring outcomes and tracking participants can help support and understand all the varying outcomes of these programs.

With these pieces in place, youth law enforcement experience programs are poised to have an impact that extends beyond recruitment. While they cannot on their own overcome the challenges associated with either individual instances of police misconduct or heavily scrutinized, national-level incidents, youth law enforcement experience programs can play a significant role in police-community relations. For example, these programs may serve to connect youth and police officers, giving both an understanding of the others' needs and roles in a community. It should be noted that these programs can be opportunities not only for youth to understand the police but also for the police to understand and connect with the needs of young people. This understanding may ultimately lead to changes in recruitment and hiring and, possibly, changes in law enforcement agencies that lead them to better relations with community members.

Through providing a pipeline to hiring and recruitment, youth law enforcement experience programs may be able to support diversity in police departments, possibly mitigating rifts between the police and the public. The programs highlighted in this guide also demonstrate that positive feedback from parents, community groups, schools, and others cuts across race, ethnic backgrounds, and gender. For these programs, the positive experiences for those directly and indirectly involved with youth law enforcement programs are seen as a net benefit.



6. Resources

RAND Census of Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs Project Page

<http://www.rand.org/census-youth-pgms>

Census Database of Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs

<https://lapsen.org/searchable-program-directory/>

U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office

https://cops.usdoj.gov/recruitment_hiring_and_retention

Law and Public Safety Education Network

<https://lapsen.org/>

Training and Technical Assistance Group

<https://lapsen.org/ttag/>

International Association of Chiefs of Police

<https://www.theiacp.org/>

International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training Youth Instructor Certification

<https://www.iadlest.org/training/youth-instructor>

National Association of School Resource Officers

<https://www.nasro.org/>

National Law Enforcement Certification for Secondary & Post-Secondary Students

<https://lapsen.org/national-le-certification/>

National Sheriffs' Association

<https://www.sheriffs.org/>

North East Regional Law Enforcement Education Association

<https://nerleea.org/>

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Appendix. Methods

We used a mixed methods approach in creating the census database, identifying example programs, and writing this guide. Our work also benefited from the input of a technical advisory group (TAG) at each step in the process. In this appendix we detail the methods used.

Technical advisory group

We convened a TAG to guide this effort. The TAG met virtually at three points during the project: The first meeting, in December 2020, focused on getting input from the TAG on the criteria for including programs in the census database, the

definitions of the relevant program categories and types, any existing lists or directories of youth law enforcement experience programs, and the types of program information that should be included. The second meeting took place in October 2021 with the TAG providing feedback on the identification of example programs, including the nomination criteria, selection factors, and outreach topics. The third TAG meeting, in September 2022, focused on gathering perspectives on the implementation considerations highlighted in this guide as well as the plans for dissemination. Throughout the project period, we kept the TAG informed of the project status and any questions via email.

Technical Advisory Group Members

Law Enforcement

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Development of the census database

The development of the Census Database was a six-step process:

1. Specify inclusion/exclusion criteria
2. Develop definitions of program categories and types
3. Identify data elements
4. Gather existing lists
5. Conduct web searches
6. Clean database

Our three initial steps in the development of the census database were to specify inclusion/exclusion criteria, define the different categories and types of youth law enforcement experience programs, and identify the program data elements that we wanted to attempt to collect for each program. After drafting these different components, we convened our TAG in December 2020 to gather its members' perspectives and suggestions. We revised the inclusion and exclusion criteria, definitions, and program data elements based on their feedback and sent the final versions for approval from the TAG in January 2021.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We developed the following program inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria to enable screening of programs for the census database:

- Inclusion criteria
 - Direct law enforcement agency involvement in the program
 - Primary focus on career preparation and recruitment
 - Target age of high school age or older
- Exclusion criteria
 - Junior Police Academies, summer camps for younger children, and Police Athletic Leagues which were not a part of a pipeline program that met inclusion criteria
 - Emergency dispatch and public safety programs without law enforcement involvement

- One-off ride-along programs
- Programs without an online presence (e.g., website, social media page) with contact information and/or a program description

We included programs in the database that had a primary focus on career preparation and recruitment, targeted students high school aged or older, and had direct LEA involvement. The programs included typically required students to have at least 40 hours of involvement per year. Programs serving middle or junior high school students were included if these students were a part of a pipeline program and would continue law enforcement education throughout high school. Junior Police Academies, summer camps for younger children, and Police Athletic League were excluded unless they served as a formal feeder program into a pipeline program that met the inclusion criteria. Emergency Dispatch programs and one-off programs such as ride-along programs were not included unless they were part of a larger criminal justice or law enforcement career program at high school level with involvement of local law enforcement agencies. We also excluded programs that did not have an online presence with contact or program information.

Definitions

With the inclusion and exclusion criteria established, we next developed definitions for the common categories and types of youth law enforcement experience programs.

For the census database, **non-school programs** were defined as programs typically managed exclusively by one law enforcement agency as a pipeline for recruitment. The types of non-school programs include the following:

- **Explorer/cadet programs.** Explorer or cadet programs are sponsored by local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to provide training and exposure to law enforcement for youth aged typically 14 to 21. While there are two basic national programs (Law Enforcement Explorers and Public Safety Cadets), local law enforcement agencies also sponsor similar programs that are not affiliated with these national programs.

- **Internship programs.** Internship programs are typically for high school graduates or college students between the ages of 18 and 21 and operate under different labels such as cadet program, internship, or apprenticeship. These programs offer paid or volunteer positions and operate full- or part-time, for a school term or for other durations. Internship programs are used to help youth decide if law enforcement is the right career for them and whether they want to work in the hosting department. Participants receive some training for the type of work they perform, which can vary widely, and only rarely have the same authority for arrest as a sworn officer.
- **Youth camps /teen academies.** Youth camps and teen academies or similarly named programs are run by local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies for middle or high school students interested in law enforcement and are typically at least 40 hours. Some are residential; some stretch over a long period of time, such as the summer.

For the census database, **school career programs** were defined as programs typically administered through a public school system with law enforcement agency involvement and a focus on preparing students for public safety careers. There are several different types of school career programs, with many programs encompassing more than one type, including the following:

- **Stand-alone high schools that focus entirely on law and public safety careers.**
- **Law enforcement career academies** that operate within high schools.
- **CTE programs that are affiliated with high schools.** These programs take different forms such as center programs where high schools send their students for part of the week to participate in a career program, concurrent enrollment programs where high school students take college courses in a career area, and comprehensive high school programs where high schools offer a number of career programs to both their students and students from other schools in the same school system.

Pipeline programs that can include middle, high school, or post high school students. Pipeline programs consist of two or more unique programs that are sequential; for example, a

high school CTE program that feeds into a cadet program or a middle school exposure program that feeds into an explorer program or high school career program.

Data elements

We next identified the data elements with information which we wanted to obtain from each program. Each list included the following data elements:

- Program information
- Organization name
- Primary contact name
- Program/Primary contact email
- Program/Primary contact phone
- Mailing address (state, city, zip code)
- Program category and type
- Age range served
- Number of students served by the program
- Length of the program (e.g., nine weeks, school year, etc.)
- Amount of time students are expected to commit to the program (e.g., monthly meetings, six weekly sessions, etc.)
- Program description
- Involved law enforcement agencies
- Number of staff
- Recruitment data

Compiling the census database

We went through several steps to compile the census database, including gathering existing lists of youth law enforcement experience programs, conducting systematic web searches, and cleaning the database.

Existing lists

To gather existing lists of non-school programs, the research team reached out to TAG members and organizations to determine the availability of existing lists of youth law enforcement experience programs. As detailed here, for the non-school programs, we obtained existing lists of explorer/cadet programs and youth camps / teen academies. We did not identify any existing lists of law enforcement internship programs. All of the existing lists included the program name and affiliated police departments. Some of the lists had additional information such as contact name, address information, and web links.

■ Explorer/cadet programs

- **Learning for Life (LFL)**, through its TAG member, provided a list of Law Enforcement Explorer posts that provide law enforcement career education programs for middle and high school students. The LFL list included police department, post number, city, and state.
- **Public Safety Cadets (PSC)**, through its TAG member, provided a list of the law enforcement agencies with PSC units that prepare young adults for careers and leadership in the public safety profession. The PSC list included law enforcement agency and state.
- **North East Regional Law Enforcement Education Association (NERLEEA)**, through its TAG member, provided a list of explorer or cadet posts run by police departments who are part of the NERLEEA organization. We supplemented the NERLEEA list with information on other programs found on NERLEEA's website. The NERLEEA list included law enforcement agency, primary contact information, and program address information.
- We obtained a list of **California Highway Patrol (CHP)** explorer posts from its website. The CHP information available on the website included program name, organization name, website address, and program contact information.

■ Youth camps/teen academies:

- We obtained a list of **American Legion** youth camp programs from the American Legion website. The American Legion list included program name, law enforcement agency, website address, primary contact information, program address information, and program descriptions.

- We obtained information on **FBI** teen academies from the website for each FBI field office. The FBI information available on the website included program name, website address, program address information, and program description.

To identify school career programs, we relied heavily on the Law and Public Safety Education Network (LAPSEN) online directory. The LAPSEN directory is a list of secondary and post-secondary schools that use the LAPSEN framework to create curriculum and career pathways. Our partners at LAPSEN updated the directory information in 2021 as they received new information from some of the schools. As they finished updating each state, LAPSEN provided the directory information to us for the database. The LAPSEN list included school, career program name, primary contact information, and program address information.

We obtained information on shared educational programs in New York state school districts related to law enforcement from the website of the New York State Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (NY BOCES). We shared this list with NY BOCES officials who provided information on other programs. The NY BOCES list included organization name, program type, website address, primary contact information, and program address information.

We compiled all existing lists into a spreadsheet with columns for each of the data elements outlined above:

■ Non-school programs

- Explorer/cadet
 - Learning for Life
 - Public Safety Cadets
 - NERLEEA
 - California Highway Patrol
- Internship
- Youth Camp / Teen Academy
 - American Legion
 - FBI

■ School Career Programs

- LAPSEN
- NY BOCES

Web searches

To identify additional programs, we conducted a systematic multiple-step on-line search strategy.

First, we created a set of keywords for each program type and wrote a script to automate the collection of Google search results. For each program type, we combined key words to target the search. For example, we searched “High school + Criminal Justice + Internship” to identify internship programs. This targeted key word approach helped us collect the names and URLs (web address) of candidate programs for each program type (table A-1). With this approach, the Google search yielded a total of 1,115 web links.

Second, we manually searched each of the 1,115 identified URLs to determine if the link described a relevant youth law enforcement experience program that met the eligibility criteria. We also checked to see if the program was a duplicate of a program already in the census database from one of the existing lists. After this review, we identified programs for the database for 24 percent of the URLs (n=270). Twelve percent of the URLs were for programs already in the database (n=137) and 63 percent of the URLs were not relevant (n=708). For the 270 URLs for new programs, we gathered as much program information as possible from the link to enter into the census database.

Third, for the more than 1,000 explorer/cadet entries compiled from existing lists, we conducted manual web searches to gather information on as many of the data elements as possible. This effort also involved extracting details from narrative descriptions of the programs and entering that into the appropriate field in the database.

Fourth, for the explorer/cadet programs, we searched the websites for the 50 largest police departments in the country as well as the state police department for all 50 states. In some cases, we contacted officials from the larger police departments to understand how they ran their explorer/cadet programs and obtain additional program information for the spreadsheet. We added the number of posts or units as a data element to account for the larger police departments that centrally managed multiple posts or units.

Database cleaning

For the non-school programs, database cleaning involved de-duplicating across the different sources and standardizing entries for the different data elements to the extent possible (e.g., consistently entering program length information as school year, six weeks, or three months).

For the school career programs, the LAPSEN directory required some manipulation to remove out-of-scope entries (e.g., Fire or Emergency Medical Technician programs) and duplicate entries within schools (e.g., two teachers for a school’s criminal justice pathway).

Table A-1. Online Search Strategy

KEY WORD CATEGORY	KEY WORD TYPE	SEARCH TERM COMBINATION
Law enforcement–related keywords	Age group key words	Youth or middle school or high school or teen or college
	Law enforcement type key words	Law enforcement or public safety or criminal justice
Program type key words	Internship programs	Intern/internship or cadet/cadet program or apprentice/apprenticeship
	Youth Camp/ Teen Academy	Youth camps or camp or teen academy or academy
	Stand-alone high schools	Law or justice
	Law enforcement career academies	Academy or magnet

Identification of example programs

The process for identifying the example programs for this guide started with asking TAG members to nominate potential programs. Then, we conducted informational interviews with the nominated programs and selected nine of them to include in the guide as examples of youth law enforcement experience programs.

Nomination of potential programs

To identify programs as candidates for inclusion in the guide, we first asked TAG members to nominate school career programs (stand-alone high schools, law enforcement career academies, or career and technical education programs) and non-school programs (internship programs, explorer/cadet programs, and youth camp/teen academy programs). We encouraged the nomination of pipeline programs for middle, high school, or post-high school students.

We asked TAG members to nominate programs that met the following criteria:

- Preparation of youth for a law enforcement career as its primary purpose
- At least one LEA as a partner or sponsor
- A duration of at least 40 hours
- A primary contact who can provide additional information about the program and its implementation
- Details on the program activities, curriculum, or other learning processes used
- Information on program outcomes such as the number of students who go on to law enforcement

We received a total of 10 nominations from TAG members. For each nominated program, TAG members completed a nomination form to provide us with information on the program category and type (including whether it is part of a pipeline program), the LEAs involved with the program, and the primary contact for the program. TAG members also reported whether information on the success of the program and details on program activities, curriculum, and other learning processes were readily available.

We also identified programs through direct outreach to programs we became aware of through our professional networks (seven programs) and a review of the census database internship programs and youth camps / teen academies (18 programs).

For each of the 35 nominated or identified programs, we categorized along different dimensions, including the following:

- Area of the country
- Program located in a metropolitan or micropolitan area, based on U.S. Census maps (<https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-maps/2020/demo/state-maps.html>)
- Number of officers at LEAs associated with the program, based on the Discover Policing agency directory (<https://www.discoverpolicing.org/explore-the-field/search-the-agency-directory/#/>)
- Size of LEAs associated with the program, based on categories from the Office of Justice Programs census of state and local law enforcement agencies (<https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/census-state-and-local-law-enforcement-agencies-2008>)

The project team then met to review the 35 potential programs and selected 18 for informational interviews to gather more details about the program.

Informational interviews and program selection

Overall, we completed informational interviews with 18 programs, including seven explorer/cadet programs, three internship programs, three youth camps / teen academies, and five school career or pipeline programs.

Our informational interviews focused on gathering additional details and updated information about each program. Specifically, we asked questions to learn more about the program's history and goals, target population, components or activities, leadership and staffing, and other aspects of the program to help understand its development and implementation.

The project team then met to review the notes from the informational interviews and select eight programs to include in this guide. For each selected program, we used the interview notes to complete the program profiles in section 4 of this guide.

About RAND Social and Economic Well-Being

RAND Social and Economic Well-Being is a division of the RAND Corporation that seeks to actively improve the health and social and economic well-being of populations and communities throughout the world. This research was conducted in the Justice Policy Program within RAND Social and Economic Well-Being. The program focuses on such topics as access to justice, policing, corrections, drug policy, and court system reform, as well as other policy concerns pertaining to public safety and criminal and civil justice. For more information, email justicepolicy@rand.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 policing officers 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.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than \$20 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. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 136,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.
- Almost 800 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than nine million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.

The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement. COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.

Law enforcement agencies across the United States use youth law enforcement programs such as camps, Explorers, internships, and vocational education programs to introduce young people to the potential of a law enforcement career. The decline in law enforcement applicant pools makes such engagement strategies even more necessary. To help determine the reach and effectiveness of these programs, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) funded RAND, in partnership with the Law and Public Safety Education Network, to conduct a census of U.S. youth law enforcement programs.

This publication, *Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs as a Potential Recruitment Pipeline*, summarizes the findings of that census and draws guidance from it for law enforcement agencies implementing their own youth programs. Intended as a roadmap for successful founding, expansion, or continuation of such programs and as a resource for networking among agencies, it describes key program features and considerations. This publication also provides resources for agencies seeking networking and mentorship from agencies with established youth engagement programs.



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

Visit the COPS Office online at cops.usdoj.gov.



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