



Police Staffing Observatory
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Police Recruitment

PRIORITIZING TACTICS TO MEET AGENCY NEEDS

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In partnership with



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Institutional Partner Support

Workforce management is among the most important challenges police agencies face. For the approximately 17,000 U.S. law enforcement agencies employing more than 700,000 sworn officers, effective staffing is critical for providing quality service to communities, facilitating the well-being of officers and professional employees, and meeting performance objectives. Recruitment and retention are crucial for building strong, effective, quality workforces—as are allocation, work scheduling, deployment, selection, training, promotions, supervision, succession planning, leadership, culture, organizational learning, and still so much more. These are complex concepts that have multidimensional interactions and effects. Historically, practitioners have had few accessible, evidence-based resources to guide their workforce planning processes.

The Police Staffing Observatory (PSO), administered as part of the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice and drawing on nearly five dozen staffing experts from around the world, helps police organizations navigate and plan for their dynamic workforce challenges. Through its research, outreach, and collaboration with the local-global law enforcement community, the PSO helps bridge the gap between scientific rigor and the operational realities of policing. The PSO is actively developing a large body of knowledge and resources offering practitioners actionable lessons on creating and sustaining their workforces.

Like the PSO, our associations prioritize staffing, and we have worked diligently with our members to understand and address the workforce needs of the law enforcement community. With this in mind, we are pleased to be institutional partners of the PSO. Working together, we can create and share resources that advance workforce science in ways that provide practical value for police agencies in meeting their staffing needs. This report is just one example of our collaboration. It demonstrates the utility of academic-practitioner partnerships for addressing public safety needs and improving the police profession. We hope you find some helpful guidance in this resource, and we encourage you to avail yourself of the many others developed by the PSO.

With our greatest support,



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Preface

Hiring for police positions can be extraordinarily difficult. Such difficulties may be compounded when organizations seek candidates with different backgrounds or specialized skills. Individual police organizations may find successful strategies to improve recruitment, but not all solutions will work the same way, nor will they work for all agencies. Furthermore, few agencies have the capacity or resources to develop their own lessons, and little information is available on the principles of a successful recruitment program. There are few useful toolkits that agencies can turn to in identifying and applying solutions that might work for their communities.

To provide practical guidance for agencies seeking to improve their staffing processes, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) provided support to the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory (PSO) in collaboration with institutional partners to identify and evaluate successful tactics for police recruitment, selection, and retention. The first in a series of three reports corresponding to each of these areas, this guide summarizes the PSO research on recruitment tactics. It reviews 225 tactics for recruitment and provides field evaluations of each. The evaluations, consisting of ratings by practitioners, include how the tactics perform not just in terms of affecting staff level, but also on metrics such as workload, time to implement, and cost, as well as effects on quality of policing and community-oriented policing. This guidebook will be particularly useful for police practitioners and planners seeking to improve their agencies' recruitment programs.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Staffing Challenge and Response

Personnel are the foundation for the work of all police organizations. Indeed, personnel costs account for most expenditures by local U.S. police departments (Buehler 2021). Recruiting personnel is a continuing and growing challenge for police organizations. State and local governments routinely identify policing positions as the hardest to fill. A 2024 survey of state and local human resources managers, for example, found that 68 percent said they had a hard time filling policing positions, and 79 percent said they had fewer qualified applicants than positions available (Young 2024). Police agencies may struggle to compete with opportunities in other fields. They also need to find officers with new skills, particularly those related to technology and the problems that community policing seeks to address. Policing is changing with increased public and media scrutiny, a shift from enforcing laws to community engagement as well as responsibility for new types of crime. Increasingly, officers must have communication, interpersonal, and technological skills in addition to traditional ones in physical fitness and firearms.

Over time, police agencies have sought to ease their recruitment challenges by pursuing more non-traditional candidates and offering recruitment incentives such as bonuses and promises of job stability (Schuck and Rabe-Hemp 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, exacerbated many of the challenges that police agencies had in hiring (Police Executive Research Forum 2020). Police morale and legitimacy also suffered after the George Floyd incident and protests (Mourtgos, Adams, and Nix 2022; Adams, Mourtgos, and Nix 2023). Though rebounding in 2024, staffing levels remained about 5 percent below what they were in 2020 (Police Executive Research Forum 2024a). In sum, hiring police personnel, particularly for specialized positions, can be extraordinarily difficult.

Police organizations have used a variety of tactics to attract recruits, some common to other industries and some more tailored to policing and specific needs within it (Foley, Guarneri, and Kelly 2008; Wilson et al. 2010; Police Executive Research Forum 2019). Among the more common tactics are increasing salary and benefits (Giblin and Galli 2017). Marketing strategies may range from billboards to online platforms and interactive video (Whetstone, Reed, and Turner 2006). Police agencies may seek to target their recruitment efforts through career fairs, community meetings, or school visits, as well as through outreach to influential members of the community such as religious leaders and athletic coaches (Wilson et al. 2013). Agencies may develop outreach to specific groups online and other directed materials which may help their image as well (Taniguchi et al. 2023). Like those in other industries, police recruiters may seek to attract recent graduates to the profession (Santos, Jaynes, and Thomas 2024) or those, such as military veterans, who may have an affinity for the work (Gibbs 2019). Finally, an agency may seek to improve its recruitment processes by streamlining them (Linos and Riesch 2020) or reducing the need for sworn personnel by hiring civilians to perform some tasks that sworn personnel do (King and Wilson 2014; Kiedrowski, Ruddell, and Petrunik 2019; Police Executive Research Forum 2024b).

In short, previous research has identified various approaches to improving police recruitment, such as through marketing, financial incentives, broad or targeted outreach, or administrative restructuring. The focus has generally been on individual activities, such as adjusting qualifications, and often emphasizing a targeted approach, such as a “high-touch” process with individualized guidance for applicants. Analyses of these tactics typically focus on one dimension of success, such as increasing the number of recruits. Little research has offered comprehensive assessments of all that an agency could do and the many ways tactics and strategies may perform and interact.

Historically, a recruiting tactic has been considered effective if it is perceived to increase the number of recruits to an agency. Yet there are many contexts where a police agency may not have the funds or resources for the tactic that works best. In devising their workforce strategies, including recruitment, agencies must also consider topics such as effects on traditional measures of department efficiency, costs to implement a tactic and timing of results, and specific department goals that may vary by community. Not all solutions will succeed for all agencies, and few agencies have the capacity or resources to develop their own lessons (Wilson and Heinonen 2012).

Furthermore, while there has been some attention in previous research on recruitment strategies, there is virtually none on the components of a successful recruitment program. Agencies need but cannot find information on the foundational principles of establishing an effective recruitment program, including how financial incentives, marketing and outreach, qualifications, and selection processes may contribute to an effective recruitment program. More generally, there are few resources that agencies can turn to in recruitment and selection. This can be particularly important for agencies that have concrete plans and support to hire staff and must act quickly. There is, in sum, limited research for agencies seeking solutions, and agencies need a centralized source of information.

Purpose

Building on our earlier research (Wilson et al. 2010), this work reviews 225 recruitment tactics identified from news articles, academic research, and practitioner reports and evaluates their effectiveness on several dimensions. Our review of academic research and practitioner reports focused on tactics identified since our earlier work (but also included our earlier work to capture tactics prior to that), while our search of tactics reported in the news focused on 2020 through 2022, when police agencies were, given the COVID-19 pandemic and some high-profile incidents of police misconduct, facing among the worst recruiting scenarios in decades. This work also provides insights into how police agencies have sought to recruit personnel for more complex environments. Through review of these tactics, identification of the most appropriate ones, and adoption and modification where appropriate, policing organizations can continually improve their recruitment and selection practices as a learning organization (Senge 1990; Senge et al. 1999; Örtenblad 2019; Wilson and Grammich 2024).

Ideally, this guide will help police agencies treat their recruitment challenge in a way that medicine treats patients: diagnose the specific issue or preexisting conditions, including context and limitations, then use an evidence-based treatment for such an issue. For example, a police agency may have an urgent need to increase its overall staff level while confronting funding shortfalls. What tactics can work within this set of circumstances? In this report, in addition to examining broad categories of tactics and their performance on different dimensions, we will explore similar scenarios and note what agencies may do in them.

Approach

For our assessment, we identified tactics from academic studies and professional organizations and government agencies published from 2010 through 2022, and news articles published from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022 (see the Appendix for a full discussion of our methodology). The broad list of terms we used to search for resources yielded 151 relevant academic articles, 73 practitioner reports, and 353 news articles, from which we identified 225 unique tactics that a department may use to recruit candidates. **We defined a recruitment tactic as any activity or process associated with identifying potential candidates and encouraging them to apply** (this includes tactics traditionally associated with candidate selection, such as speeding the hiring process or easing hiring requirements, if they are likely to also affect recruitment). Overall, the tactics we considered cover a broad range of practices associated with administrative, financial, outreach, and other strategies.

Once we identified the tactics, 42 practitioners with direct staffing experience and knowledge about staffing processes evaluated their effects, such as those on the number of staff and workload management as well as ease of implementation (see box summarizing performance dimensions and their scales). We created a broad sample of respondents to rate the tactics, including practitioners with executive and personnel program experience, from different-sized (small, medium, large) and types (local, state, university) of departments, and from varying geographic regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). (Note the sample size precludes the representation of each stratum and substratum for each specific tactic.) We randomly assigned tactics to practitioners for assessment, with each tactic being sent to three practitioners for review. Practitioners completed their review between June and October 2024. We retained for each analysis only tactics for which at least two respondents had provided assessments for each performance dimension considered, and we averaged the ratings.

Performance Dimensions

We asked respondents to rank each tactic using the following scales:

- Would the tactic decrease or increase the number of staff?
 1. Large decrease (5% or more over a year)
 2. Modest decrease (less than 5% over a year)
 3. No change
 4. Modest increase (less than 5% over a year)
 5. Large increase (5% or more over a year)
 6. Unsure
- Would the tactic make workload management less or more effective?
 1. Much less effective
 2. Somewhat less effective
 3. No change
 4. Somewhat more effective
 5. Much more effective
 6. Unsure
- Would the tactic have a delayed or immediate impact on department staffing levels?
 1. Very delayed (more than 24 months)
 2. Somewhat delayed (13 to 24 months)
 3. Somewhat immediate (3 to 12 months)
 4. Very immediate (within 3 months)
 5. Unsure
- Would the tactic be difficult or easy to implement?
 1. Very difficult (significant staff time and coordination over a year)
 2. Somewhat difficult (moderate staff time and coordination over a year)
 3. Somewhat easy (modest staff time and coordination over a year)
 4. Very easy (little staff time and coordination over a year)
 5. Unsure
- Would the tactic increase or decrease agency costs?
 1. Greatly increase (\$50,000 or more over a year)
 2. Somewhat increase (less than \$50,000 over a year)
 3. No effect
 4. Somewhat decrease (less than \$50,000 over a year)
 5. Greatly decrease (\$50,000 or more over a year)
 6. Unsure
- Would the tactic reduce or increase the quality of police work?
 1. Greatly reduce
 2. Somewhat reduce
 3. No effect
 4. Somewhat increase
 5. Greatly increase
 6. Unsure
- Would the tactic impede or advance the goals of community policing?
 1. Greatly impede
 2. Somewhat impede
 3. No effect
 4. Somewhat advance
 5. Greatly advance
 6. Unsure

We generally did not expect practitioners to rate tactics equally on all dimensions. Rather, we assumed these results would point to different tactics that agencies should use in different circumstances.

Outline—and How to Use This Guide

Using the answers from practitioners, we consider the tactics in three ways. In Chapter 2, we identify tactics that perform well on each of these dimensions, with some attention as well to how tactics perform across dimensions. In Chapter 3, we review tactics agencies in different circumstances, e.g., needing to balance cost and timing, may wish to consider. We summarize our findings and their implications in Chapter 4.

We again note that not all tactics will apply to all departments in all scenarios. Similarly, we note that our analysis is of tactics (differentiated from strategies) that agencies may wish to use. Tactics (e.g., increasing pay for officers) are actions that agencies may wish to undertake to implement a broader, strategic goal (e.g., use financial incentives to increase the number of officers). Readers may wish to identify the situation they encounter (e.g., need to improve quality of policing) and review the relevant section on the most effective tactics to achieve such a goal (e.g., mentor applicants or potential applicants). Because some tactics are ranked highly across multiple dimensions, they appear repeatedly in our discussions. Our repeated mention of such tactics is not an endorsement of them—only individual departments can decide what will work best for their communities—but rather reflects our decision to have discussion of individual dimensions be self-standing.

Readers may see some surprising omissions. A tactic may be omitted for two reasons. First, it may not have been cited in any of the materials we reviewed. Second, it may have been cited but not ranked highly by our subject matter experts as a promising tactic for attracting recruits. For example, job fairs, a commonly cited tactic, received middling reviews from our subject matter experts, who saw such events as having little effect on the dimensions we analyze, including increasing the number of staff. Media reports also indicate mixed results for job fairs, with some agencies indicating more individualized contact—even if with someone breaking the law—can be more effective for police recruitment (Jones 2020; Conde 2022).

The core of our discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 revolves around identified dimensions (e.g., top-rated tactics for increasing staffing level) or combinations of dimensions (e.g., tactics that may help increase staffing levels while minimizing costs as well as time and effort for implementation). In each section, we present a table with the tactics receiving the highest rating by the specified dimension, and some select discussion of what previous research or media reports say about it. Callout boxes, noted as *Field Spotlights*, also present details of some recent applications for tactics discussed in Chapter 2. Readers may skim for the dimensions of most concern to them and review those sections only. Our concluding chapter offers some overarching lessons from this work.

Chapter 2: Prioritizing Tactics Based on Key Performance Dimensions

Police agencies seeking to improve their hiring practices may do so in different ways. There are several steps to this larger process, each with its own unique components. Among these, for example, are instilling interest in a potential recruit, having the recruit complete the qualification process, and ensuring a recruit successfully completes training and joins the force. Each of these steps may have their own nuances. Communities may wish to attract officers with certain qualifications. Recruits may need assistance with qualifying or meeting expenses such as those for tuition or relocation to join the force. And agencies may find ways to ease the burden of recruiting personnel by reducing the need for such personnel, such as shifting personnel from other units to patrol or shifting duties from sworn police officers to civilian employees.

Police agencies may also face differing demands in recruiting at different times. Some may need to increase staff generally and rapidly, with demand for higher numbers of staff crowding out other goals. Others may need to increase staffing but at little additional expense. Still others may need to improve the quality of policing work. Some may also wish to improve their implementation and practice of community policing.

Below, we consider the highest-rated tactics for each dimension we consider relative to the recruitment phase. For each dimension, we present a table listing all those appearing above a cutoff score, ranked by their effectiveness and their number of evaluations. For the highest-ranking tactics, we also present some context on their practice.

Staffing Level

Our respondents identified 25 tactics that would have a modest-to-large positive effect on staffing level over the course of a year.¹ Table 2.1 lists these, the number of respondents evaluating each, and the average rating of these responses. Recall that, for assessing the effect on the number of staff, a rating of '5' indicates an increase of at least 5 percent over a year, and a rating of 4 indicates an increase of less than 5 percent. Of the tactics shown, all exceed a rating of 4 (meaning at least one reviewer gave it a '5'), and some achieve a 5 from all reviewers rating it.

¹ Hiring civilians for nonviolent calls, increasing training, increasing acceptance of law enforcement classes or degrees at public colleges, and conducting workload assessments also rated highly (5), but only by one respondent so they are excluded from the discussion.

Table 2.1: Top Rated Tactics for *Increasing Staffing Level*

Tactic	Mean	n
Mentoring applicants or potential applicants	5.00	3
Provide applicants with individualized guidance	5.00	2
Community event outreach for recruiting	4.67	3
Increasing pay	4.67	3
Recruitment analysis	4.67	3
Streamlining the hiring process, e.g., combining steps where possible	4.67	3
Adding exam or other preference points for desired characteristics	4.50	2
Applicant analysis	4.50	2
Easing financial requirements	4.50	2
Implementing a special tax for recruitment and retention increase	4.50	2
Improving retiree (non-pension) benefits	4.50	2
Loosening citizenship requirement, e.g., allow lawful permanent residents to apply	4.50	2
Modifying hiring standards to reflect current needs	4.50	2
Recruiting events for women	4.50	2
Creating or having recruiting positions	4.33	3
Developing a recruitment website	4.33	3
Easing physical appearance requirements	4.33	3
Education incentives, e.g., more pay for officers with a college degree	4.33	3
Engaging with candidates throughout the hiring process	4.33	3
Establishing lateral hiring procedures	4.33	3
Have recruitment materials reflect community demographics	4.33	3
Health-club membership	4.33	3
Online exams	4.33	3
Reducing processing times from application to hire	4.33	3
Statewide recruitment funds	4.33	3

The tactic receiving the widest and deepest support for increasing the number of staff was “mentoring applicants or potential applicants.” All three respondents on this tactic gave it a rating of ‘5’, indicating it would generate a “large increase,” or an increase of at least 5 percent in staff over the next year. Previous research suggests police can begin to mentor community members and potential applicants well before they are eligible to apply to the department (Bolden and Rahr no date). Mentoring middle- and high-school students can both be an effective approach to recruitment and help foster positive perceptions of the police. Mentoring may also involve meet-and-greets with recruits’ families, which can provide support and integration for recruits while completing the academy (Police Executive Research Forum 2019). For those who are in the application process, previous research indicates that mentoring can be particularly helpful for recruits who may wish to reapply and improve their candidacy (Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center 2020). Police departments may also form a peer support program with officers and recruits meeting and discussing police work (Sun et al. 2022). Such programs

provide recruits with mental health support and help to mitigate the stressors that accompany the job.

A similar tactic, “provide applicants with individualized guidance,” was rated ‘5’ by two of the three reviewers of it, with a third reviewer providing a rating of “unsure” for its effect on the number of staff. Previous research suggests that forming personal connections with applicants, such as by meeting the applicant’s family and having open lines of communication with the applicant, can help increase the number of applicants who successfully complete the process (Wiseman 2021).

News reports on mentoring programs noted they can introduce an agency to those who may not otherwise consider it and provide agencies an opportunity for recruits to see many facets of it. One Connecticut agency seeking more youthful recruits found success in a Ranger program that attracted candidates interested in policing generally but without knowledge of the agency specifically (Regan 2022). The Ranger program provided “an entry into the town” for those unfamiliar with it. Another report noted that mentoring can help explain to young candidates “what police officers do . . . [M]ost people think that police only do enforcement, but the reality is that’s a small part. If you don’t like how policing is done, you have the opportunity to [change it]. We have to show young people the positive they can create in their communities” (Cordeiro et al. 2021, A.1).

The Madison (Wisconsin) Police Department has curtailed attrition in its recruitment process through a hands-on approach to individualized guidance, particularly regarding fitness testing (Morison 2017). Following an initial screening test, the department’s training team helps recruits prepare for a state-mandated entry-level physical fitness test.

Ranking just behind mentoring and individualized guidance for increasing staffing level, four tactics received an average rating of 4.67 for their effect on increasing the number of officers: two reviewers gave these tactics the highest rating of ‘5’ and the third rated them a ‘4’ for having a positive if modest effect. Perhaps not surprisingly, “increasing pay” was one of these. Perhaps also not surprisingly, all three reviewers viewed “increasing pay” an expensive tactic. They did not perceive it as an immediate solution to staffing needs (though see discussion in box about recent effects in Detroit).

Another tactic related to recruit finances that may boost recruitment and hence staffing levels is easing financial requirements, and specifically not disqualifying applicants with financial debt (Police Executive Research Forum 2021). Many applicants may have college loan or credit card debt, but this does not necessarily indicate that they are unprepared to be a police officer. Restricting hiring due to financial concerns may unnecessarily restrict the pool of recruits.

Field Spotlight

Community events can combine multiple phases of the recruitment process to boost officer numbers. For example, the Michigan State Police offer events where interested applicants can complete the fitness exam and written exam (Breen 2025). Community events may also occur at local restaurants or businesses, at events such as “coffee with a cop” or “pizza with the police,” as well as with citizens’ academies or local faith groups, where the community can meet members of and better understand the department (Bradley 2020).

For one large department, increased pay attracted a large number of new officers and even a substantial number of returning ones. Following a \$10,000 increase in the salary for starting officers, the Detroit Police Department added 300 recruits and saw 41 officers who had left the force return to it (Kinchen

Workload Management

Our respondents identified 21 tactics that would have a modest-to-large effect in improving workload management.² Table 2.2 lists these, the number of respondents evaluating each, and the average rating of these responses. Recall that for increasing the effect on workload management, a rating of ‘5’ indicates a tactic would make workforce management “much more effective” and one of ‘4’ would make it “somewhat more effective.” Of the tactics shown, all exceed a rating of 4 (meaning at least one reviewer gave them a ‘5’).

² Outreach to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) was rated highly (5) by one respondent, but its other two reviewers were unsure of its effect on this dimension. As such, it was removed from this analysis.

Table 2.2: Top Rated Tactics for *Improving Workload Management*

Tactic	Mean	n
Provide applicants with individualized guidance	5.00	2
Hiring ahead of vacancies	4.67	3
Statewide funds for social workers or similar to assist police work	4.67	3
Civilianize positions, i.e., have civilians perform work that officers now do	4.50	2
Community outpost program, e.g., police-organized community centers	4.50	2
Easing financial requirements	4.50	2
Hiring retired officers	4.50	2
Making real-time communication available	4.50	2
Reducing workload by reducing calls for service	4.50	2
Statewide retention bonuses	4.50	2
Developing a recruitment plan	4.33	3
Establishing lateral hiring procedures	4.33	3
Hiring community-service officers who might consider a law enforcement career	4.33	3
Improving equipment or facilities	4.33	3
Increasing pay	4.33	3
Mentoring applicants or potential applicants	4.33	3
Provide a take-home car	4.33	3
Reconfiguring the department for efficiency	4.33	3
Recruitment analysis	4.33	3
Reducing processing times from application to hire	4.33	3
Streamlining the hiring process, e.g., combining steps where possible	4.33	3

Providing applicants with individual guidance received an average rating of five on this dimension, but one reviewer was “unsure” of its effect on workforce management. Two reviewers did tout the effect of individualized guidance on the number of recruits, as we saw above.

Two other tactics—hiring ahead of vacancies and statewide funds for social workers or similar to assist with police work—received average ratings of 4.67, indicating two of three reviewers of these tactics gave them a ‘5’ and the third gave it a ‘4’. Hiring ahead of vacancies may be particularly helpful when an agency is expecting, but not yet realizing, a wave of departures. Spokane, Washington implemented such a program in the year before approximately 350 members of the force became eligible for retirement (Shanks 2022; Mason 2022). Agencies in all parts of the country have reported using social workers to handle a variety of calls where their expertise may be more appropriate. The State College (Pennsylvania) Police Department received state funding to hire a social worker whose duties include responding to issues concerning mental health and homelessness (Rushton 2022). Mount Vernon, Washington, police hired social workers to address calls related to homelessness, addiction, and mental health (Stone 2022). Lancaster, Pennsylvania police added a social worker to assist calls involving domestic disputes, mental health, or poverty conditions (Nepkin 2021). Newport News, Virginia, police hired social workers to assist on calls

regarding domestic violence as well as those involving abuse or neglect of children and older and incapacitated adults, and to reduce wait times on other calls (Nolte 2021). Following a pilot program, Fayetteville, Arkansas, police hired social workers to deploy on noncriminal calls (Kemp 2021).

Having civilians perform work that officers may do has also received more attention over time (Police Executive Research Forum 2024b). Indeed, civilians comprise more than one-third of employees in general-purpose police agencies in the United States, and comprise an increasing number of police leaders, suggesting police recruiting issues should increasingly reflect civilian issues as well (Hall and Meisenholder 2024). Having civilians perform some police duties can also yield other benefits such as improved response time (see box). An analysis of the Philadelphia (PA) Police Department suggested that nearly 900 positions, including those at front desks, data entry, permit issuance, court liaisons, office managers, human resources, mail transport, and graphic design could be civilianized (Orso 2022).

Field Spotlight

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department uses nonsworn personnel to respond to minor traffic accidents (Sands 2025). The Civilian Crash Investigation Unit, launched in December 2024, speeds response times and frees sworn officers for more urgent calls. Prior to the establishment of the unit, officers spent about 30,000 hours annually responding to minor crashes. Unit investigators complete a six-week certification program to respond to crashes limited to property damage. They wear body cameras and also provide backup for cases involving intoxicated drivers, contraband, hit-and-ruin, lack of insurance or valid license, and other infractions. The North Carolina legislation permitting creation of this unit has led Burlington, Greensboro, and Wilmington to implement similar initiatives.

Timing of Effects

Our respondents identified 10 tactics that, on average, might have a very immediate effect, that is, an effect within three months of implementation.³ Table 2.3 lists these, the number of respondents evaluating each, and the average rating of these responses. Recall that for measuring the timing of impact on department staffing levels, a rating of ‘4’ indicates a “very immediate impact,” i.e., one having an impact within three months of implementation, and a rating of ‘3’ indicates a “somewhat immediate impact,” i.e., one having an impact within three to 12 months. Of the tactics shown, all have a rating of at least 3.67, indicating at least two reviewers gave it a ‘4’ and none gave it a rating below a ‘3’.

³ Excluded from the discussion are four tactics that received a ‘4’ rating by a single subject matter expert, including advertising fitness standards, HBCU outreach, hiring an outside agency for leadership, and hiring or signing bonus.

Table 2.3: Top Rated Tactics Based on *Immediacy of Effect*

Tactic	Mean	n
Changing call priorities	4.00	3
Department-produced video featuring officer "stories"	4.00	2
Increasing education requirements	4.00	2
Modifying hiring standards to reflect current needs	4.00	2
Statewide retention bonuses	4.00	2
Adapting policies to women's needs	3.67	3
Increasing screening standards, e.g., for drug offenses	3.67	3
Provide a take-home car	3.67	3
Reducing patrols	3.67	3
Streamlining the hiring process, e.g., combining steps where possible	3.67	3

The top-rated tactic, receiving a score of ‘4’ on this dimension from all three raters who reviewed it, was “changing call priorities.” (See accompanying box for discussion of recent application of this tactic.) Similarly, “reducing patrols” received a score of 3.67, indicating that two reviewers gave it a rating of ‘4’ and the third gave it a rating of ‘3’ on this dimension. At the same time, the raters noted drawbacks for these tactics: more difficult workforce management and reduced quality of police work for reducing patrols, and greater difficulties in advancing the goals of community policing for both. Four other tactics also received a score of “4” on this dimension, but only from two of three reviewers. One of these, modifying hiring standards to reflect current needs, scored highly on affecting staffing levels, but again only from two of three reviewers. (See accompanying box for a recent application of this tactic.)

Some policies that may be quick to implement can have other benefits. For example, the raters noted adapting policies to women’s needs may have a modest effect on the number of staff. Researchers have found that advancing women in policing can lead to fewer uses of excessive force and better outcomes for crime victims (McGough and Roman 2024). Similarly, the raters noted streamlining the application process could help increase the number of staff, make workload management more effective, and advance the goals of community policing. Researchers have provided experimental evidence that reducing perceived burden in recruitment increased compliance with application processes, though removing steps that would have allowed for better understanding of eligibility kept unqualified candidates in the process for longer (Linos and Riesch 2020). Another way to streamline the hiring process would be to have an individual guide the recruitment mission and interact with applicants as necessary (Comrie 2020).

Field Spotlight

The Beaumont (Texas) Police Department no longer responds to non-active calls for eight types of crime: assault, auto burglary, criminal mischief, forgery or fraud, harassment, identity theft, threats, and theft (Noble 2025). By shifting complaints of these crimes to phone or online reporting, the department claims it will save nearly 4,200 hours yearly. Such complaints account for about 4,000 of the department's 140,000 annual calls. The department continues to investigate such complaints but believes the shift will make officers able to respond to other calls more quickly.

In response to a 55 percent decrease in the number of applicants since 2018, the New York Police Department has proposed reducing the minimum number of college credits required to enter the police academy from 60 to 24 (Woods and Fitz-Gibbon 2025). In 2023, the college education standard forced the department to disqualify 2,275 applicants, 29 percent of the total for that year. Based on a recent assessment by the National College Course Recommendations Service, the department will also consider those who complete its six-month academy as having completed 45 credits, an increase from the 36 previously credited.

Ease of Implementation

Our respondents identified 14 tactics that, on average, would be “somewhat easy” or “very easy” to implement.⁴ Table 2.4 lists these, the number of respondents evaluating each, and the average rating of these responses. Recall that for ease of implementation a rating of ‘4’ indicates “very easy,” i.e., require little staff time and coordination over a year, and a rating of ‘3’ indicates “somewhat easy,” i.e., require modest staff time and coordination over a year. Of the tactics shown, all have a rating of at least 3.67, meaning at least two reviewers gave it a score of ‘4’ on this dimension.

⁴ Loosening citizen and height requirements were also rated a ‘4’, but only by a single respondent.

Table 2.4: Top Rated Tactics Based on *Ease of Implementation*

Tactic	Mean	n
Advertising fitness standards	4.00	3
Female-specific recruitment materials	4.00	3
Collecting and analyzing data on promotions	4.00	2
Exit interviews	4.00	2
Advertising police benefits	3.67	3
Easing physical appearance requirements	3.67	3
Easing residency or proximity requirement	3.67	3
Including encouraging language in follow-up communications	3.67	3
Modifying fitness requirements	3.67	3
Offering department tours	3.67	3
Officer recognition events	3.67	3
Ride-alongs	3.67	3
Targeting nontraditional fields, e.g., nursing or social work	3.67	3
Waiving application or testing fees	3.67	3

The two tactics receiving a score of ‘4’ on this dimension from all three reviewers rating it both relate to outreach in some way, as do several of the topics receiving a mean rating of 3.67. Put another way, practitioners suggest outreach tactics may be among the easiest to implement, although their effects, of course, may vary.

One academic researcher offers intriguing experimental evidence regarding the effect of “advertising fitness standards” and “female-specific recruitment materials” (Aiello 2024). The experiment asked participants their interest in applying to a police agency with a universal physical fitness test or another with sex-normed physical fitness tests. Potential women applicants had significantly lower interest in the department with a universal test and significantly higher interest in the one with a sex-normed test. (See accompanying box for a current application of these tactics.)

Another common theme among tactics evaluated as relatively easy to implement is modification of requirements. Raters noted varying other effects for these tactics. They suggested modifying physical appearance requirements would help increase the number of staff. They suggested eliminating or modifying the residency requirement would lead to a modest boost on agency costs while having a modest adverse impact on community policing. Our reviewers also suggested modifying fitness requirements would lead to modest boosts in agency costs. Departments may take a varied approach to requirements. The Middletown (Ohio) Division of Police and the Fairfield (Ohio) Police Department, for example, lifted some restrictions on tattoos while retaining policies prohibiting tattoos on the face, neck, or hand, as well as any offensive tattoos (Pack 2022).

Field Spotlight

Online postings provide easy ways for departments to reach potential applicants, including about standards and requirements. The Tasmania (Australia) Police provide a web page (<https://recruitment.police.tas.gov.au/recruitment-process/fitness-psychometric-testing/>) with detailed information on fitness tests and requirements. The page lists age-based standards for assessments, body-mass index, agility, and grip strength, as well as on required aptitude and problem-solving tests. It also lists resources for recruits to prepare for these tests.

Agency Costs

Our raters suggested that many recruitment tactics would increase agency costs. This is not surprising: all else equal, more staff, the goal of increased recruitment, will cost more money. Nevertheless, there were 14 tactics that they suggested could, on average, modestly reduce agency costs.⁵ Table 2.5 lists these, the number of respondents providing an evaluation of each, and the average rating of these responses. Recall that for the dimension on agency costs a rating of ‘5’ indicates a tactic that would “greatly decrease” agency costs, i.e., reduce agency costs at least \$50,000 per year, a rating of ‘4’ indicates a tactic that “somewhat decrease” agency costs, i.e., lead to savings of less than \$50,000 per year, and a rating of ‘3’ indicates a tactic that would have “no effect” on agency costs. Of the tactics shown, all have a mean rating of at least 3.33, indicating at least one respondent indicated the tactic would at least “somewhat decrease” agency costs.

Table 2.5: Top Rated Tactics for *Decreasing Agency Costs*

Tactic	Mean	n
Statewide training funds	4.33	3
Reducing or condensing training	4.00	3
Civilianize positions, i.e., have civilians perform work that officers now do	4.00	2
Developing a recruitment plan	4.00	2
Easing financial requirements	4.00	2
Allowance for "clawback" for those leaving department before specified period	3.67	3
Implementing a special tax for recruitment and retention increase	3.50	2
Providing realistic job previews	3.50	2
Advertising continuously	3.33	3
Establishing lateral hiring procedures	3.33	3
General lateral hires	3.33	3
Reducing processing times from application to hire	3.33	3
Reducing training requirements for lateral transfers	3.33	3
Streamlining the hiring process, e.g., combining steps where possible	3.33	3

⁵ College student pathway programs and reducing workload though calls for service reduction received ratings of ‘4’ but only from one reviewer. We therefore exclude them here.

The highest rated tactic, receiving a ‘4’ from two raters and a ‘5’ from the third, was “statewide training funds.” Obviously, this is something beyond what an individual agency can generate. Nevertheless, policymakers in states facing widespread police shortages have sought to foster statewide initiatives to boost the numbers of law enforcement officers. Pennsylvania officials, for example, have considered statewide funding for training, recruitment, and bonuses for new officers (Tung 2022). Minnesota officials, facing broad workforce shortages, have similarly suggested statewide advertising campaigns, reimbursement of education and training costs of those wishing to become officers, and signing bonuses for new recruits (Bierschbach 2022). California officials have considered statewide incentive programs for recruits to live and serve in underserved communities (Desai 2022).

Our raters also suggested that communities may realize some modest savings by being able to reduce or condense training. At the same time, they recognized some shortcomings of this tactic, suggesting it may have some adverse effects on the quality of police work or efforts to advance the goals of community policing. (See accompanying box for a recent application of this tactic.) This reinforces the notion that agencies need to consider their priorities in light of the various effects associated with specific tactics, which we illustrate more specifically in the following chapter.

Field Spotlight

Illinois State Police offer an abbreviated Lateral Entry Training Program for law enforcement personnel with at least two years of experience elsewhere (Bell 2022). Under this program, qualified applicants can attend a 14-week academy rather than the traditional 26-week program and need complete only five weeks of the abbreviated program in person. Furthermore, lateral transfers can pick the district in which they wish to work. Background checks for troopers in this program are the same as they are for others completing the full application process.

Quality of Policing

Ideally, new recruits would improve the quality of the existing force. We therefore asked three of our raters to evaluate the recruitment tactics we identified for their impact on the quality of police work. They identified seven tactics that would “somewhat increase” to “greatly increase” the quality of police work.⁶ Table 2.6 lists these, the number of respondents providing a rating for each, and the average rating of these responses. Recall that for the dimension on quality of police work, a

⁶ Three tactics—community relations analysis, devising “superhero” storylines for officers, and workload assessments—received a rating of ‘5’ on this dimension from one respondent, but “unsure” from the others. These tactics also received “unsure” ratings from raters on several other dimensions, perhaps indicating a need for further analysis regarding their context within recruitment.

‘4’ indicates “somewhat increase” and a ‘5’ indicates “greatly increase.” Of the tactics shown, all have a mean rating of at least 4.33, with at least one rater giving the tactic a ‘5’ rating.

Table 2.6: Top Rated Tactics for *Improving Quality of Policing*

Tactic	Mean	n
Targeting a broad range of college majors	4.50	2
College student pathway program, e.g., those meeting qualifications get entry-level jobs	4.33	3
General community outreach	4.33	3
Hiring ahead of vacancies	4.33	3
Improving equipment or facilities	4.33	3
Mentoring applicants or potential applicants	4.33	3
Statewide training funds	4.33	3

Education or training is a common theme in three of the tactics—targeting a broad range of college majors, college student pathway program, and statewide training funds—rated to have a positive impact on quality of policing. Some, such as general community outreach and hiring ahead of vacancies, rate highly on another dimension as well. (See accompanying box for a recent application of outreach to a broad range of college majors.)

Departments have sought benefits in improving equipment or facilities beyond making themselves more attractive to recruits. One North Carolina department hoped to improve retention as well by improving its equipment (Home 2022). An Illinois agency also sought to improve the health and well-being of its staff by providing exercise equipment for department members (Roth 2021).

Field Spotlight

Previous research has suggested that police recruiting efforts for colleges and universities should expand beyond criminal justice majors and consider other majors such as law, political science, psychology, and sociology (Elkins 2019). Accordingly, the Chicago Police Department welcomes a variety of college majors, such as criminal justice, social science, and public administration, among applicants (see department recruitment website at <https://join.chicagopolice.org/>). While the department requires 60 semester hours (or 90 quarter hours) from an accredited college or university, it also offers partial waivers for this requirement, such as through military service or employment in social services, health care services, or education. The department also seeks applicants from a variety of majors through visits to educational institutions.

Community Policing

Recruitment also offers a means for agencies to advance their practice of community policing. As local agencies shift from enforcing laws to community engagement, as well as toward accepting greater responsibility for social issues and new types of crime, they require officers with

communication, interpersonal, and technological skills in addition to the traditional ones in physical fitness and firearms. Even as police departments struggle to get more applicants, they must attract increasingly well-qualified ones.

We asked our respondents to rate tactics by their likely impact on community policing. As throughout, we asked different groups of three respondents to rate each tactic on this dimension. There were 11 tactics that, on average, received a mean rating at least halfway between “somewhat advance” and “greatly advance” the goals of community policing.⁷ Table 2.7 lists these, the number of respondents providing a rating for each, and the average rating of these responses. Recall that for the dimension of community policing, a ‘4’ indicates “somewhat advance” and a ‘5’ indicates “greatly advance.”

Table 2.7: Top Rated Tactics for Advancing Community Policing

Tactic	Mean	n
General community outreach	5.00	3
Community relations analysis	5.00	2
Community event outreach for recruiting	4.67	3
Community outpost program, e.g., police community centers	4.67	3
Outreach to ethnic organizations	4.67	3
Ride-alongs	4.67	3
Developing a recruitment plan	4.50	2
Setting goals for underrepresented groups	4.50	2
Statewide recruitment funds	4.50	2
Targeting a broad range of college majors	4.50	2
Workload assessments	4.50	2

Different forms of community outreach are prominent on this list—and account for all recruitment tactics that at least two of three raters said could also advance community policing. Put another way, our raters suggest that community outreach is good for both recruitment and community policing.

Practitioners also indicate the importance of community outreach for both community policing and recruiting, and how they are intertwined. An officer with a Pennsylvania agency, citing a “firm” belief in community policing, noted the importance of “residents [getting] to know the officers, and the officers [getting to know the residents,” and the resulting “positive relationship between the police and the community” (Meko 2020). Similarly, an Illinois official noted the importance of both outreach and related efforts to “chang[e] the conversation about policing” and “tell a more positive story about what law enforcement is doing” (“Hiring Crisis Worries Police Departments” 2021). Outreach efforts to organizations such as “faith-based partners” may also help both advance

⁷ One respondent rated highly (5) standardizing discipline across jurisdictions.

community policing and police recruitment efforts (Walker 2021). (See accompanying box for application of community outreach to personnel issues.)

Field Spotlight

The “Front Porch Roll Call” provides one means for improving relations between police and the community (Owsinski 2023). Such meetings may be scheduled with a community coordinator (e.g., Crime Watch captain) or be requested by any group of neighbors wishing to meet the officers patrolling their neighborhood. The meetings provide an opportunity for police and residents to mingle, learn more about each other, and discuss public safety issues. Such meetings offer residents the opportunity to convey their observations on policing needs, and police assignments can be adjusted then and there to better respond to community needs. Community outreach can take less direct forms as well. The Roanoke (Virginia) Police Department, for example, maintains outreach with the community by reading stories to pre-school children once a week, helping elementary school students with their homework, and helping create cards to give to children at a local hospital (Roanoke Police Department, no date).

Chapter 3: Prioritizing Tactics Based on Common Scenarios of Needs and Strategy Preferences

As our discussion of the dimensions of police recruitment notes, police agencies may have varying goals in recruiting officers. Beyond seeking to increase their number of officers or offset departures from the force, they may seek to improve the quality and management of their work or attract new skills to it, ideally doing so at little additional expenditure. As the discussion of the previous chapter notes, tactics to achieve some goals may limit the achievement of others. Put another way, police agencies may need to recognize and choose among tactics that match their top goals, while also recognizing their effects on others.

Furthermore, police agencies may wish to undertake some tactics for other reasons but also wish to know their effect on recruitment. For example, an agency may wish to increase pay to increase retention but also want to know how quickly such a tactic can affect recruitment and how it compares to other financial tactics in costs for recruitment. Alternatively, it may consider a variety of marketing strategies for recruitment and wish to know how each strategy or tactic compares by cost and timing of effect in seeking to balance between the two.

The objective of identifying what is considered “best” is obscure when tactics affect several different components of the department in distinct ways. An agency cannot assume that tactics are “one-size-fits-all” for any department, time, or circumstance. The scenarios we consider, however, can be tailored to the unique needs of a department.

This chapter considers several scenarios in which agencies may wish to choose among tactics in pursuing broader strategies related to recruitment or other issues. It compares ratings of tactics among related groups (e.g., financial, marketing, recruitment process) on differing dimensions. We consider affecting staffing level as the primary dimension and then examine how the tactics vary by other dimensions. Our goals are two-fold: to demonstrate the tradeoffs that agencies may wish to make in choosing recruitment strategies and tactics, and to explore some common, specific scenarios that agencies may encounter.

Staffing Level, Timing, Cost, and Implementation Ease

We first consider possible tradeoffs along dimensions for timing of effect, cost of tactic, and ease of implementation. While our raters identified several tactics that are likely to boost staffing levels, these may vary in the timing of their effects, their costs, and their ease of implementation. How agencies may want to trade off among effectiveness in recruitment, timing, costs, and implementation effort may also vary. Table 3.1 helps illustrate these tradeoffs. Note that if a tactic receives fewer than two ratings on any dimension shown in the tables of this chapter, we do not consider it in the given scenario.

Table 3.1: Top Tactics for Increasing Staff Level by Timing, Cost, and Ease of Implementation

Tactic	Level		Timing		Cost		Ease	
	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n
Provide applicants with individualized guidance	5.00	2	3.33	3	2.33	3	3.00	3
Mentoring applicants or potential applicants	5.00	3	3.33	3	2.33	3	2.33	3
Streamlining the hiring process	4.67	3	3.67	3	3.33	3	3.00	3
Increasing pay	4.67	3	3.00	3	1.00	3	2.33	3
Recruitment analysis	4.67	3	2.33	3	2.50	2	2.33	3
Community event outreach for recruiting	4.67	3	2.33	3	2.00	2	2.33	3
Modifying hiring standards to reflect current needs	4.50	2	4.00	2	2.67	3	3.33	3
Easing financial requirements	4.50	2	3.50	2	4.00	2	3.50	2
Implementing a special tax for recruitment and retention	4.50	2	3.50	2	3.50	2	3.00	2
Adding exam or preference points for desired characteristics	4.50	2	3.50	2	3.00	2	2.50	2
Applicant analysis	4.50	2	2.50	2	2.50	2	2.50	2
Improving retiree (non-pension) benefits	4.50	2	2.50	2	1.33	3	2.50	2

Two of the tactics rated most effective for increasing staff levels—providing applicants with individualized guidance and mentoring applicants or potential applicants—both rely on individualized approaches. They are also rated similarly in the timing of their effects (about a year), their cost (less than \$50,000 per year), and their ease of implementation (somewhat easy to somewhat difficult). Which of these an agency chooses to follow may depend on the specific interests of its staff in working with applicants. Other tactics also rated highly effective in increasing staff levels rate less well than these two in timing, cost, or ease of implementation. If an agency is seeking a tactic that may be nearly as effective in increasing staff level but possibly be quicker to implement with less cost or implementation burden, it might consider streamlining the hiring process. No one tactic will prove ideal for every agency, but each agency may consider the tradeoffs it faces and select the tactic best for it.

Workload Management, Timing, Cost, and Implementation Ease

Police agencies may seek opportunities to better manage their workload. How quickly they wish to improve workload management, the cost they are willing to bear in doing so, and the work they want to do to improve workload management may vary. We therefore next look at the recruitment tactics best rated to make workload management more effective, comparing these by their effects on timing, cost, and ease of implementation. Table 3.2 helps illustrate the tradeoffs among these dimensions.

Table 3.2: Top Tactics for Workload Management by Timing, Cost, and Ease of Implementation

Tactic	Workload		Timing		Cost		Ease	
	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n
Provide applicants with individualized guidance	5.00	2	3.33	3	2.33	3	3.00	3
Hiring ahead of vacancies	4.67	3	3.33	3	2.67	3	3.00	3
Easing financial requirements	4.50	2	3.50	2	4.00	2	3.50	2
Civilianize positions	4.50	2	3.50	2	4.00	2	1.50	2
Making real-time communication available	4.50	2	3.50	2	2.00	2	3.00	2
Community outpost program	4.50	2	3.50	2	2.00	3	2.33	3
Hiring retired officers	4.50	2	3.00	2	3.00	2	3.33	3

Providing applicants with individualized guidance received a high mean rating for workload management, but its timing, cost, and implementation ease ratings are modest. Local agencies looking for more certainty among these multiple dimensions may wish to consider hiring ahead of vacancies or easing financial requirements for recruits.

Quality and Community Policing

Agencies may seek to improve the quality of their work through recruitment while improving their community policing efforts as well. We therefore looked at tactics best rated to improve service quality by their effects on community policing. Table 3.3 helps illustrate the tradeoffs among these dimensions.

Table 3.3: Top Tactics for Improving Quality by Effects on Community Policing

Tactic	Quality		Community Policing	
	Mean	n	Mean	n
Targeting a broad range of college majors	4.50	2	4.50	2
General community outreach	4.33	3	5.00	3
College student pathway program	4.33	3	4.33	3
Mentoring applicants or potential applicants	4.33	3	4.33	3
Hiring ahead of vacancies	4.33	3	4.00	3
Improving equipment or facilities	4.33	3	3.67	3
Statewide training funds	4.33	3	3.33	3

The tactics most associated with affecting quality appear promising across at least one other dimension but vary somewhat. Those looking to advance community policing in addition to improving quality may wish to undertake general community outreach. All three raters of this tactic suggested it would greatly advance the goals of community policing.

Financial Tactics and Effects on Staff Level and Cost

Police agencies may undertake other staff initiatives with an eye toward how they will affect recruiting as well. For example, they may seek to increase salary and benefits for staff and wish to know their effect on recruiting. Or they may wish to identify the most affordable benefits that would help boost recruiting. We consider several recruitment tactics that provide broader financial incentives to staff, such as salary and pay, and examine their rated effectiveness on staffing levels and costs. Table 3.4 shows these results. Our raters suggested that several financial tactics can help boost staffing levels but also carry substantial costs. For example, increasing pay received a mean rating of 4.67 on a 5-point scale for increasing staffing level, but also a mean rating of '1', indicating likely cost increases of at least \$50,000 per year, on the cost dimension. In other words, increasing pay will increase staff, but will also, of course, cost money.

Table 3.4: Financial Tactics and Effects on Staff Level and Cost

Tactic	Level		Cost	
	Mean	n	Mean	n
Increasing pay	4.67	3	1.00	3
Improving retiree (non-pension) benefits	4.50	2	1.33	3
Education incentives, e.g., more pay for officers with a college degree	4.33	3	2.67	3
Health-club membership	4.33	3	2.00	3
Education reimbursement for tuition	4.00	3	2.00	3
Flexible schedules	4.00	3	2.00	2
Referral incentives, e.g., bonuses for officers referring successful candidates	4.00	3	2.00	3
Retention bonuses, e.g., for completing specified years of service	4.00	3	2.00	3
Stipends for single parents with young children	4.00	3	2.00	3
Driving allowance	4.00	3	1.67	3
Specialized skill pay	4.00	2	1.50	2
Hazard pay	4.00	3	1.33	3
Improving general benefits	4.00	3	1.33	3
Provide a take-home car	4.00	3	1.33	3
Improving or increasing retirement plans	4.00	2	1.00	2
Portable retirement plan	4.00	3	1.00	2

There are, however, other, less expensive ways agencies can make themselves more financially attractive to recruits. While all the tactics shown in Table 3.4 are rated to have at least some increased cost to the agency, these costs may vary. For example, two of our raters suggested education incentives, e.g., more pay for officers with a college degree, may cost an agency less than \$50,000 per year. The third rater of this tactic even suggested it would result in modest cost savings. This resulted in a mean overall rating on cost of 2.67 on a 5-point scale. Two raters also suggested education incentives may yield benefits in improving the quality of police work and advancing the goals of policing.

Financial Tactics and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

In some circumstances, agencies may wish to increase their staff as rapidly as possible through financially based tactics, while considering tradeoffs between time and cost. They may wish, for example, to find the most economical way to increase their staff most rapidly. Or they may wish to understand what a more economical way for increasing staff will mean for the timing of staff increases. We therefore looked at financial tactics best rated for their effects on staff level by their effects on timing and cost. Table 3.5 shows these results.

Table 3.5: Financial Tactics and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Tactic	Level		Timing		Cost	
	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n
Increasing pay	4.67	3	3.00	3	1.00	3
Improving retiree (non-pension) benefits	4.50	2	2.50	2	1.33	3
Education incentives	4.33	3	3.50	2	2.67	3
Health-club membership	4.33	3	2.50	2	2.00	3
Provide a take-home car	4.00	3	3.67	3	1.33	3
Specialized skill pay	4.00	2	3.50	2	1.50	2
Driving allowance	4.00	3	3.33	3	1.67	3
Stipends for single parents with young children	4.00	3	3.00	2	2.00	3
Hazard pay	4.00	3	3.00	3	1.33	3
Education reimbursement for tuition	4.00	3	2.67	3	2.00	3
Referral incentives	4.00	3	2.67	3	2.00	3
Retention bonuses	4.00	3	2.67	3	2.00	3
Improving general benefits	4.00	3	2.33	3	1.33	3

On average, raters suggested that seven of the financial tactics most effective at increasing staff levels would show effects in 12 months or fewer. Education incentives, which we saw earlier appear to be effective at increasing staff levels at modest cost, also appear to be relatively quick in their effects. Raters suggested that providing take-home cars would have the quickest effect on staff level among the tactics shown, but likely also at substantial additional expense. A driving allowance or specialized skill pay would also have relatively quick effects but perhaps at less expense than that of take-home cars.

Marketing Tactics and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Marketing tactics present a targeted way for agencies to attract potential applicants. Tactics such as advertising, while costing money, do not bear the costs that broad-based financial incentives do. There were 12 marketing tactics to which raters gave a mean score of at least '4' on effects regarding staffing levels, indicating they would boost staffing levels over the course of a year. Table 3.6 lists these, along with raters' evaluations of the timing of their effects and on agency costs.

Table 3.6: Marketing Tactics and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Tactic	Level		Timing		Cost	
	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n
Developing a recruitment website	4.33	3	2.67	3	2.67	3
Have recruitment materials reflect community demographics	4.33	3	2.67	3	2.67	3
Advertising continuously	4.00	3	3.00	3	3.33	3
Advertising on social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)	4.00	3	3.00	3	2.50	2
Touting police employment image	4.00	3	3.00	3	2.33	3
Advertising on websites	4.00	2	3.00	3	2.00	3
Investing in high-quality media	4.00	3	3.00	3	1.67	3
Broad advertising (e.g., billboards, mass media)	4.00	3	3.00	3	1.50	2
Stressing public service behaviors in recruitment materials	4.00	2	2.67	3	2.50	2
Creating a marketing "snapshot" of the department	4.00	3	2.67	3	2.50	2
Female-specific recruitment materials	4.00	2	2.50	2	2.33	3
One-to-one marketing, e.g., door-to-door visits	4.00	2	2.00	2	2.00	2

The two marketing tactics that raters suggested would most boost staff levels, developing a recruitment website and having recruitment materials affect community demographics, scored identically on timing and costs. Should agencies seek a tactic nearly as effective on boosting staff levels but possibly offering quicker effects at lower costs, they may wish to consider continuous advertising.

Modifying Qualifications and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Departments could influence their pool of potential recruits by modifying their qualifications. Easing or loosening some requirements, for example, could expand the number of persons eligible to apply for sworn officer positions. There were 7 tactics related to modification of qualifications to which raters gave a mean score of at least '4' on effects regarding staffing levels, indicating they

would boost staffing levels over the course of a year, and for which at least two respondents provided ratings for timing and cost. Table 3.7 lists these, along with raters’ evaluations of the timing of such effects and agency costs.

Table 3.7: Modifying Qualifications and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Tactic	Level		Timing		Cost	
	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n
Modifying hiring standards to reflect current needs	4.50	2	4.00	2	2.67	3
Easing financial requirements	4.50	2	3.50	2	4.00	2
Exam or preference points for desired characteristics	4.50	2	3.50	2	3.00	2
Loosening citizenship requirement	4.50	2	2.50	2	3.00	2
Easing physical appearance requirements	4.33	3	3.33	3	3.00	2
Hiring ahead of vacancies	4.00	3	3.33	3	2.67	3
Easing residency or proximity requirement	4.00	3	2.33	3	2.00	3

Four qualifications tactics had two raters each on staffing level. One rater on each gave it a rating of ‘4’, indicating it would boost staffing levels by no more than 5 percent in the next year, and one rater on each gave it a rating of ‘5’, indicating it would boost staffing levels more than 5 percent. These raters generally agreed that the suggested qualifications tactics would have an effect within a year and would have no effect on or possibly reduce costs. Three raters suggested hiring ahead of vacancies would have nearly as strong an effect on hiring levels and timing of effects, though possibly incurring modest increases in cost.

Modifying Processes and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Regardless of the size of the pool of potential recruits, agencies could explore ways to improve their processes to hire more officers more quickly, or in an expeditious manner to retain the interest of applicants. Possible changes to the hiring process that may affect the level of staff include providing applicants with individualized guidance, streamlining the hiring process (i.e., reducing or combining a number of steps), reducing processing times, online exams, and steps to keep candidates informed of the process. There were 10 tactics related to recruitment processes to which raters gave a mean score of at least ‘4’ on effects regarding staffing levels, indicating they would boost staffing levels over the course of a year. Table 3.8 lists these, along with raters’ evaluations of the timing of such effects and agency costs.

Table 3.8: Modifying Processes and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Tactic	Level		Timing		Cost	
	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n
Provide applicants with individualized guidance	5.00	2	3.33	3	2.33	3
Streamlining the hiring process	4.67	3	3.67	3	3.33	3
Engaging with candidates throughout the hiring process	4.33	3	3.33	3	2.00	3
Reducing processing times from application to hire	4.33	3	3.00	3	3.33	3
Online exams	4.33	3	3.00	3	2.00	2
Including encouraging language in follow-up communications	4.00	2	3.50	2	3.00	3
Emails to candidates to remind them of process steps	4.00	3	3.00	2	3.00	2
Expediting the process for officers with a degree	4.00	3	3.00	2	2.67	3
Increasing the number of academy classes	4.00	3	3.00	2	1.50	2
Paying for travel to take test	4.00	3	3.00	2	1.33	3

Raters suggested providing applicants with individual guidance could boost staff levels by more than 5 percent over a year, though at some modest cost to the agency. They suggested streamlining the hiring process by reducing or combining steps would have nearly as strong an effect on staffing levels while possibly leading to cost savings. A related process that could boost staffing levels and possibly yield modest savings is reducing processing times from application to hire. In other words, more individualized processes may be most effective but also carry some expense, while more general changes to processes may be a little less effective but also less likely to carry additional costs.

Outreach and Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Agencies may shape their pool of applicants as well as their relations with the community through outreach tactics. Outreach tactics that may affect recruiting may include recruiting events for underrepresented groups, outreach to community organizations, targeting nontraditional fields for recruiting, and outreach to schools or colleges. Below, we consider the effects of outreach tactics by their effects on staffing level, timing of effects, and costs.

There were 19 tactics related to outreach to which raters gave a mean score of at least '4' on effects regarding staffing levels, indicating they would boost staffing levels over the course of a year, and for which at least two respondents provided ratings for timing and cost. Table 3.9 lists these, along with raters' evaluations of the timing of such effects and agency costs.

Table 3.9: Outreach Effects on Staff Level, Timing, and Cost

Tactic	Level		Timing		Cost	
	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n
Mentoring applicants or potential applicants	5.00	3	3.33	3	2.33	3
Community event outreach for recruiting	4.67	3	2.33	3	2.00	2
Targeting college graduates	4.00	3	3.50	2	2.00	2
Community outpost program	4.00	3	3.50	2	2.00	3
Word of mouth recruiting	4.00	2	3.33	3	3.00	3
Outreach to ethnic organizations	4.00	3	3.00	2	3.00	2
Targeting a broad range of college majors	4.00	2	3.00	2	2.33	3
Creating a community recruitment task force	4.00	3	3.00	3	2.33	3
Targeting athletes	4.00	2	3.00	2	2.00	2
One-to-one outreach, e.g., having a single recruiter	4.00	3	2.67	3	3.00	3
Train recruiters to connect with underrepresented groups	4.00	3	2.67	3	2.67	3
Targeting nontraditional fields, e.g., nursing or social work	4.00	2	2.50	2	2.00	2
Explorers program	4.00	3	2.33	3	2.33	3
Providing realistic job previews	4.00	3	2.00	2	3.50	2
School outreach for recruiting	4.00	2	2.00	2	2.33	3
Targeting youthful recruits	4.00	3	2.00	2	2.33	3
Engage underrepresented groups on officer characteristics	4.00	2	2.00	2	2.00	2
College outreach	4.00	3	1.67	3	2.33	3
Developing youth programs or outreach	4.00	3	1.67	3	2.00	3

As we've seen elsewhere, here, too, mentoring applicants or potential applicants can increase staffing levels within a year at perhaps a modest cost. Community outreach for recruiting can also boost the number of staff, although its effects may be a little slower and its costs a little greater. Creating a community outpost program may be a little quicker to implement but also may realize a more modest boost in staffing levels and carry more of a cost.

Chapter 4: Applying the Lessons

How should police departments use our findings? Our research suggests three issues to consider when selecting recruitment tactics.

First, a police department should use the tactic that appears to be most tailored to it and its environment. It should not choose what seems easy or has been done historically. The nearly 20,000 police agencies in the United States serve an enormous variety of jurisdictions, each with its own expectations and circumstances. No single tactic will be best for each one.

Second, a police department needs to know what works under its own circumstances. Just as there is no single tactic for recruiting in all departments, there will be no single recruitment tactic that is best for a given department in all circumstances. A department will need to choose a tactic based on its most pressing circumstances, such as increasing staff levels, improving staff quality, advancing community policing, or recruiting under a minimal budget.

Third, a police department should consider relevant combinations of dimensions. For a faster and inexpensive solution, for example, it should examine tactic speed and costs. To improve community engagement, it should consider recruitment tactics that advance community policing efforts. To increase job satisfaction among officers, it should consider tactics that improve the quality of police work and management of its workload.

The variety of tactics we explored can be adapted to different departments. Using the data, departments can focus on the multifaceted benefits or drawbacks of a tactic. They can begin or continue to solidify a recruitment plan that is specific to their needs. The vast number of tactics and their categorization enable departments to visualize potential outcomes through a wider and more descriptive lens. It is up to different departments to select from among these in devising tailored solutions to their recruitment issues.

Appendix

We identified tactics from several sources. The first was academic studies published from 2010 through 2022, identified from EBSCO, SSCI, and Proquest. The second was news articles published from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022, identified from ProQuest US Newsstream and Nexis Uni. The third was practitioner reports from professional organizations and government agencies, published from 2010 through 2022. News articles offer a detailed and underused source of information on police staffing. Given the importance of police staffing to communities, local media routinely cover recruitment and selection experiences and the innovative ways that police agencies seek to improve these. From the academic studies, we identified sources that mentioned (1) polic*, “law enforcement”, cop, or cops and (2) mentioned recruit*, select*, hire*, short*, staff*, personnel, employee, workforce, applicants, or applications (to broaden the news search even further, we added additional optional terms, including turnover, attrition, retention, retain*, or loss). For the practitioner reports, we manually searched the websites of organizations and agencies that work in the area to identify relevant content. After filtering for duplicate articles as well as those that did not address police recruitment or selection issues, we found 151 relevant academic articles, 73 practitioner reports, and 353 news articles.

From these sources, we identified 225 unique tactics that departments might use to recruit candidates or that may affect the need to recruit candidates. For the present purpose, we defined a recruitment tactic as any activity or process associated with identifying potential candidates and encouraging them to apply. We defined a selection tactic as any activity or process associated with choosing candidates from among those who applied. It is important to note that some selection tactics may also support recruitment. For example, we would generally consider adjusting hiring standards or speeding up the hiring process to be selection tactics, but these aspects can be communicated to potential recruits and ultimately encourage them to apply. For our analysis, we include both recruitment and selection tactics that affect the recruitment process (and exclude tactics related to selection that are not as likely to affect recruitment, such as hiring an external firm to hire candidates). Overall, the tactics we considered cover a broad range of practices such as offering recruitment bonuses, easing lateral transfers, modifying requirements, or “civilianizing” positions. Using an iterative, grounded-theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Aksulu and Wade 2010), we also organized the tactics into strategies that are meaningful to practitioners, such as administrative, financial, and outreach, as outlined above.

Once we identified the tactics, we asked groups of practitioners knowledgeable about staffing processes to evaluate their effects, such as their likely effects on the number of staff and workload management as well as ease of implementation, also as outlined above. We formed a modified quota sampling frame to identify subject matter experts for surveying. The sampling frame had four distinct strata that were further deconstructed into substrata. To create a more inclusive survey pool, we ensured each substratum had at least three participants. These strata and substrata were

- Respondent’s position and assignment within their organization, with two substrata
 - executive officers

- program personnel, i.e., individuals who have direct, substantial roles administering and implementing the recruitment process.
- Department size, with three substrata
 - small agencies with fewer than 40 sworn personnel
 - medium agencies with 40 to 99 sworn personnel
 - large agencies with at least 100 sworn personnel.
- Type of department, with three substrata
 - local
 - state
 - university.
- Region, with four substrata
 - South
 - West
 - Midwest
 - Northeast.

Altogether, we asked 42 subject matter experts to participate; of these, 30 agreed to rank these tactics, resulting in a 71 percent response rate. Surveys were completed from June to October 2024. Ten groups of three respondents each were given approximately 25 random tactics to evaluate, using scales to consider each (see box in Chapter 1). While there is benefit from the overall variety of the sample and from requesting multiple ratings received for each tactic, the representation of each stratum and substratum was not possible for each specific tactic. This was a concession necessary given the extraordinarily large number of tactics requiring assessment. To limit the possibility of ratings being skewed by any particular respondent's experience, we retained for each analysis only tactics where at least two respondents provided assessments for each performance dimension considered.

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About the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory

The **Police Staffing Observatory (PSO)** is a global collaborative of academics, scholars, practitioners, and students working with the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice to promote evidence-based police workforce research, strategy and operations. Directed by Professor Jeremy M. Wilson, its primary aims are to advance police workforce knowledge and its application by

- conducting timely and innovative research on critical aspects of a wide-range of police staffing issues, resulting in scholarly and practitioner-oriented resources;
- creating a venue for the network of police staffing scholars to share opportunities, discuss ideas, and enable collaborations;
- facilitating researcher-practitioner partnerships;
- serving as a repository and dissemination vehicle for the research of collaborators so that it is easily discoverable by practitioners, policymakers, and others.

Through its facilitation of research and outreach, the PSO is a community of science that serves as a valuable resource for the community of practice. Hundreds of resources spanning police staffing systems can be accessed from the PSO website, <https://cj.msu.edu/community/psa>.