

**MEETING THE PERSONNEL NEEDS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE
NEXT MILLENNIUM**

JOURNAL ARTICLE

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PEACE OFFICER STANDARDS AND TRAINING
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

MAY 1998

25-0512

This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

The goal of this Command College project was to research and study the future personnel demands of law enforcement in the Los Angeles/Orange County region and develop strategies to meet those demands. This study was prompted when it was determined the Newport Beach Police Department will have to hire a minimum of 39 police officers over the next five years due to service retirements and a pending annexation. The prospect of recruiting, hiring and training this many officers will be a daunting task for an organization of moderate size.

Likewise, the City of Hawthorne, a community significantly different in terms of demographics from Newport Beach, is facing a similar problem. Although recently suffering layoffs, Hawthorne will still lose a number of its personnel over the next five years due to service retirements. In addition, it is probable the department may have to hire to fill some of the positions lost due to layoffs in the near future. Likewise, a number of police departments hired many officers during the growth period of the 1960's and 1970's and many of these baby boom officers are now reaching service retirement age. All of these police agencies will also be competing for the best and the brightest recruits.

To obtain a better idea of what the overall hiring needs would be over the next five years, a questionnaire was mailed to local area police departments. For the 37 responding police departments, a minimum of 4,794 new police officers or 28.4% of their total strength will have to be hired over the next five years. This is a significant number of officers that will have to be recruited, hired, sent to an academy unless a lateral hire, receive field training and survive probation. There is no doubt this will be a difficult and demanding task.

The next question to ask is where the next generation of future police officers will come from. The answer to this question requires a study of population demographics. Scanning techniques were used to research various sources and to gain a better idea of what future demographics will be. Many new workers will be entering the job market in the next five years, but the fact remains that the labor force is getting older. The fastest growing segment of the labor force over the next ten years is those workers that are 55 years of age and older and this group is projected to increase 42.5% or 6.6 million workers nationwide. On the other hand, the 25 to 34 year old age group is projected to decrease by about 4 million workers during this ten year period.¹ At the same time, the number of men participating in the labor force is projected to decline across all age groups, while the number of working women is predicted to increase from 46 to 48% of the total work force. This is the smallest differential between men and women in the workplace for which there are records available.²

In addition, the ethnic mix of Southern California is changing and becoming more diverse. Both the Hispanic and the Asian population have become the two fastest growing ethnic groups in Southern California. It is estimated that in the next 20 years Caucasians in almost all Southern California areas will no longer be a majority.³ It is anticipated the Hispanic population in the Western region of the United States will increase 50.1% by 2025 while the Asian population is projected to increase 56%.⁴ Not only will it be necessary to meet the law enforcement needs of these rapidly growing groups with such diverse cultural, political, and societal issues, but it will be equally important to recruit, hire and train these individuals as police officers.

Certainly, the economy can have a major impact on the job market and the labor pool. A strong economy with a thriving job market increases the demand for workers and causes competition amongst employers hiring those workers. The economy of both Los Angeles and Orange Counties has improved over the last two years and is projected to continue its growth.⁵ Simultaneously, college graduates are witnessing the brightest hiring outlook in years. Impressive salary offers, signing bonuses, and early job offers are common occurrences as the economy improves.⁶ With such competition for the best and brightest candidates, it is apparent the ability to draw educated, qualified applicants to law enforcement careers could prove to be a challenging endeavor.

In order to analyze these issues, identify trends and events, and develop ideas for a strategic plan, a Nominal Group Technique panel was convened. The trends that were identified by the NGT panel as having the greatest positive impact on recruiting included the level of preparation and training for potential recruits, the prospects for regionalization of hiring and training, the new generation of officers and the development of effective marketing strategies. Those trends with a potential negative impact included the size and makeup of the applicant pool, the difficult and complex nature of the job, the rising number of retirements, and the increasing number of additional police officer positions. Those events that could have a generally negative effect on recruiting issues were the occurrence of a singular event of a highly publicized negative nature or an economic difficulty such as a bankruptcy or recession. Events that may have a positive effect included the possibility of an election impacting hiring and retirement issues, an event resulting in a change in salary and benefits, and the occurrence of a positive, highly publicized significant event.

In order to be successful in the future, departments must begin developing strategic plans to address these issues. Strategic planning is a long-term, futures oriented approach which addresses the needs of an organization. It includes assessing the current state of the organization, goal setting, and strategy building that leads the organization to its desired future state. Because strategic planning is a team effort that builds consensus for the future of the organization, the process itself is just as important as the finished document.

A number of strategies were identified to improve the ability of law enforcement to successfully recruit officers. First, it is critical that law enforcement agencies understand the benefits of hiring ethnic minority officers. The best argument for hiring from minority groups does not rest on legal requirements such as affirmative action. Hiring minorities is fundamental in providing excellent police service to the communities we serve. By establishing specially trained ethnic or minority recruitment task forces we can be successful at working with minority referral sources, youth-based organizations, high schools, colleges, and immigrant or refugee service organizations. These units can provide recruitment counseling in ethnic minority neighborhoods, and develop job announcements in newspapers and magazines and on radio and television catering to ethnic minorities.

To aid departments in the testing, hiring and retaining minority and non-native candidates, a number of options may be considered. It is suggested agencies enroll candidates in reading comprehension courses, establish a pre-academy to assist applicants prepare for the testing process and the rigors of academy training, and to encourage recruits to work closely with a mentor during training at the academy. It will be important to identify and resolve cultural differences that may interfere with law enforcement

operating principles and performance, and to help candidates develop their language and communication skills.⁷

Interaction with the community is one of the keys to developing a successful recruiting program. Contact with the youth in our communities is an opportunity to recruit good candidates. Explorer and Cadet programs are excellent opportunities to work with young people who are interested in careers in law enforcement, as are high school criminal justice and student ride-along programs which can encourage their participation.

Citizen academies and volunteer units are another excellent source of community interaction and recruitment efforts. To recruit female candidates, especially female minorities, which have traditionally been somewhat difficult to attract, one department sent recruiting teams to local health clubs to seek out physically fit female candidates who might be interested in careers in law enforcement. This has been very helpful in attracting female candidates who are in excellent physical condition and are able to pass the physical agility test.

Law enforcement agencies have traditionally waited for qualified applicants to come to them. Given the fact that there will be so many police officer jobs available in the early part of the 21st Century, we no longer will have that luxury. We must reach out to prospective candidates. This project has shown that many people just don't understand how to become a police officer. Recruitment videos and informational department sponsored meetings are valuable tools to educate potential candidates on how to become a police officer.

With the new technologies available, we must take advantage of the opportunities including use of the Internet and the computer generated sharing of information. It is

highly recommended that we also establish recruiting teams to aggressively target qualified individuals in local colleges and learning institutions.

Fire departments have had little difficulty in attracting a large number of applicants. In fact, they have attracted so many that there are more qualified applicants than jobs available. Based on this, another recommendation is that pre-service fire academies be searched for qualified applicants that may be interested in the field of law enforcement.

Another area worthy of exploration is the possibility of offering scholarships to candidates who are qualified and willing to make a commitment of service to the organization. Law enforcement organizations must also look at providing benefits to potential employees who are willing to relocate. These benefits may include moving costs, signing bonuses, etc. Improvements in the wage and benefits package were identified as being a key factor in the retention of qualified personnel. Although this issue involves a political process, it is important to remember that the quality of police officers can save a city significant money in potential lawsuits that are more likely to occur with less qualified officers.

By implementing these strategies, police departments can work towards developing a future scenario that has a successful outcome. This will enable the agency to realize the benefits of strategic planning and the techniques for managing change while improving their ability to recruit, hire, train and develop new officers.

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor and Statistics, "New 1994-2005 Employment Projections," December 1, 1995, USDL: 95-485, 2.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Marilyn Kalfus, "Hispanics to Lead by a Nose in 2020," *Orange County Register*, 24 July 1997, sec. B, p. 1.

⁴ U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Population Division, "Population Projections for States by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2025," prepared by Paul R. Campbell (October 1996) PPL-47, 1-2.

⁵ Elliot Blair Smith, "O. C. Future: 11 Years of Expansion?," *Orange County Register*, 6 December 1996, sec. A, p. 1.

⁶ Hillary Chura, "You're Hired, Kid", *Orange County Register*, 12 May 1997, sec. A, p. 1.

⁷ U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Crime Prevention Council, prepared by Sarah Hay, "Lengthening the Stride: Employing Peace Officers" (November 1995) 9.

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