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POLICE CADET PROGRAMS
AS A SOURCE OF RECRUITMENT

ACQUISITIONS

Background

In the last ten years, recruitment has become a major concern to law enforcement agencies in California and the nation. Gone are the days when long lines of potential applicants waited to test for one or two openings. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find, process and hire people who can meet the expectations and requirements of law enforcement. While the demands of the job increase, the available pool of young people seems to be decreasing.

A recent survey of 2,500 chiefs of police and sheriffs by the National Institute of Justice revealed that staff shortages and recruitment were two of the areas of greatest concern nationwide. Of those surveyed, 72 percent of the chiefs and 75 percent of the sheriffs reported shortages for sworn officers within their departments at the time the survey was conducted (Manilli 1986 p.6). Locally, the Fullerton Police Department tracked 227 applicants who had passed their written examination for police officer in 1986, and found that only 10 had ultimately been hired.

Many factors have been contributing to recruiting difficulties by police agencies, including the following:

- * The "baby bust" of the 1960's has resulted in fewer young people available to enter the job market during the 1980's. It appears

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that this trend will continue, as the population of 18 to 21 year olds is decreasing at the rate of 3 percent per year.

- * Drug use among young people has increased over the years and many agencies have found it necessary to relax their standards in order to meet the need for new officers.
- * Experts tell us that the population of the State of California will continue to grow at the rate of about 400,000 new residents per year through the year 2000 and that much of this new growth will be among minority populations, primarily Asian and Hispanic. Both the increase in and the diversity of the population will impact the issue of police recruitment in the years to come. Cultural differences and language barriers, have made minority groups difficult for law enforcement to recruit from.
- * There is a perception that the quality of public education is decreasing, resulting in young people who cannot pass the written tests required for employment in the police service. A study by the California Post Secondary Education Commission showed that less than 30 percent of high school graduates were eligible to attend a public four-year institution. Of that 30 percent approximately one-half were Asian, a third were non-Hispanic white, 15 percent were Hispanic and 10 percent were Black (California Secondary Education Commission, 1987). At the same time, a recent POST study indicated that there is a direct relationship between education level and success as a law enforcement applicant (POST 1986 p.5). The irony of the

situation is that as the quality of education appears to be declining in the public schools, a great number of the best educated young people available are to be found among the most difficult of the target groups for recruitment as police officers: Asians, Hispanics and Blacks.

* Rapidly expanding technological advances continue to create many new career paths for this smaller population of young people to pursue.

It appears that these and other trends in the environment appear as if they will continue, at least into the foreseeable future; thus law enforcement needs to look for viable alternative approaches to solve the recruitment dilemma in the 1990's.

History of Police Cadet Programs

Police cadets - nonsworn young people employed by police agencies part time as "para professionals" - were first introduced into municipal police departments in the United States in the 1950's, primarily for the purpose of recruiting qualified young people to police service before they found employment in industry or other public services.

Early cadet programs were only partially successful, due to resistance to civilianization, lack of training, lack of rotation of duties and the limiting of job duties to clerical tasks, washing police cars and other mundane tasks. Because of these problems,

many of the best young people were discouraged from continuing in the programs until the age of twenty-one.

Over the years, however, these early problems have gradually been overcome, and many agencies now have viable cadet programs that have initiated formal training and rotation through various interesting assignments. They are also providing their departments with well-trained employees who are versed in the culture of their respective organizations, understand their goals and objectives, and who are ready to attend the police academy and continue their careers in law enforcement.

Most cadet programs require participants to continue their formal education while working part time as police cadets. This results in better educated police officers in the years to come.

Police Cadets as a Source for Recruitment

Police cadet programs provide a department with the opportunity to observe the cadet for a period of two to three years before hiring the individual as a police officer. During this period cadets should be evaluated as to their potential as sworn officers, not just for the duties they are assigned as cadets. Unsuitable candidates can be dropped from the program without the significant expense which accompanies the dismissal of a sworn officer during the academy or probationary period. The young people are, in turn, provided with an opportunity to determine whether or not police

work is really what they want to do with their lives, before really committing to it as a career.

The question then becomes, "does this program really result in a viable pool of candidates to accept openings in the sworn ranks, and, how well do they succeed when selected?" A recent study by the Fullerton Police Department of the success rates of civilian police trainees vs cadets promoted to the position of police trainee points to the success of cadet programs as a source of recruitment. While the study is certainly limited, the results are significant: Out of 59 civilian trainees processed since 1989, 32 either failed probation or have left the department, resulting in a 45.8 percent retention rate. On the other hand, 15 cadets were processed during the same period and only two failed probation or left the department, resulting in a retention rate of 86.7 percent (Thompson 1987).

In March 1989, the author surveyed 48 medium-sized police departments within the State of California in order to determine current trends in the use of police cadet programs. Sixty-four percent of those surveyed responded and provided the information contained in Exhibit I. The most significant question of the survey in terms of the issue of recruitment was "what percentage of cadets successfully complete probation as sworn officers?" Ninety-five percent responded that their agencies were experiencing a success rate of between 80 and 100 percent for cadets who went on to become

sworn police officers.

In addition to their potential as sworn police officers, cadets are also valuable employees of the police agencies that employ them. The survey results show that cadets are helping to relieve the manpower shortage in a multitude of ways, including: assisting desk officers, taking desk reports, answering telephones, assisting investigators in managing their caseloads, working records, property, the jail, dispatching, and even taking police reports in the field.

Conclusion

Police cadet programs originated for the purpose of attracting young people to police work before they became involved in other career paths. They began, therefore, as a recruitment tool, and evidence indicates that they may be one of the best recruitment tools available to law enforcement. Many cadet programs have evolved into fairly complex programs involving cadets in a number of activities of the department. Most require cadets to continue their formal education as a condition of employment, which will eventually result in a higher level of education among police officers generally.

In addition, viable cadet programs can provide some answers to the need for recruiting among the minority communities. Young people adapt to the culture and norms of their adopted countries faster

than the adult population. Cadet recruitment efforts directed toward minority young people offers the prospect of more qualified minority officers in the future.

Data developed in the survey conducted by the author, as well as other research, also indicates that law enforcement may begin to hire police cadets at even younger ages, even while still in high school. Some law enforcement agencies are expanding explorer programs and involving them in activities formerly reserved for cadets, such as dispatching, evidence control and answering telephones. This may well be the first step to hiring younger police cadets.

The evidence indicates that the recruitment crisis in law enforcement will continue for many years. The value of police cadet programs in helping solve this crisis was perhaps best summed up by the cadet coordinator for the Lansing, Mich., Police Department in a 1983 article: "When the time comes to hire full-time officers, you will have a group of applicants that are already partially trained the way you want them trained. And they will not be leaving you after a few months because law enforcement was not what they saw on T.V. They will know what to expect and you will know what kind of performance you can expect out of them" (Hoestra 1983).

BIOGRAPHY

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