PSO Perspective

Dimensions of a Police Recruitment Program

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This *PSO Perspective* summarizes lessons from our research, Dimensions of a Police Recruitment Program, appearing in *Policing: An International Journal, 2025*. It identifies the key elements of police recruitment programs, supporting a more systematic approach to recruitment by reviewing academic and practitioner literature from 2010 to 2024 and conducting interviews with 26 subject-matter experts.

Difficulties with Recruitment

Police recruitment poses a significant challenge today, with new difficulties constantly arising. Police agencies' ability to recruit high-quality candidates is being affected by a myriad of issues, such as changes in generational preferences, economic opportunities, population aging, legitimacy concerns, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increases in retirements and resignations.

Approach

For police agencies to conceptualize recruitment in broader terms, we identified key components of effective recruitment programs from a thorough review of the literature from 2010 to 2024. We formed a taxonomy using a grounded-theory approach that differentiated components into: *Elements*, i.e. basic building blocks; *Dimensions*, i.e. major themes of common elements; and *Levels*, i.e. primary location of common dimensions. Due to the expansive and complex nature of recruitment programs, we do not contend these represent all components, but they do indicate primary components commonly considered relevant to the recruitment process.

We interviewed 26 subject-matter experts to obtain their assessment of the recruitment dimensions and elements identified by the literature, and to learn if any important ones were missing. Participants varied in their position and assignment, and their departments' size, type, and region. We ensured to interview at least three practitioners from each major category.

Organizational-Level Dimensions

Recruitment programs must be promoted at the organizational level to set in place structures and mechanisms that can facilitate their operations.

Leadership

Diversity in leadership roles displays to recruits that the organization values differences at all levels. Leadership must also understand the goals of their recruits, such as their values and preferences (e.g. work-life balance).

Culture

An overall healthy organizational culture leads to employees feeling comfortable, accepted, and optimistic, which can make the department more appealing to recruits.

Budget allocation

Recruitment programs are more likely to be successful when utilizing an allocated budget and resources, which can ease recruitment management and diversify recruitment activities. However, those representing smaller departments saw this as less important.

Recruitment goals

Recruitment goals should use a performance-based approach that analyzes workload and performance objectives while also matching community needs and reflecting the diversity of the community.

Unit-Level Dimensions

The unit level is concerned with the day-to-day operations of programs and their administration.

Strategies

Removing application barriers, expediting hiring practices, offering competitive salaries, providing academy sponsorship, reimbursing college tuition, and maintaining constant communication with the recruit are among key approaches.

Metrics

Metrics can help recruitment programs monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. First-year attrition, cost-per-hire, where applicants are lost in the hiring process, and quality of hire are particularly important.

Organizational learning

Recruitment programs benefit from adopting principles of a learning organization. This involves continual review and innovation of processes to promote improvement within the program itself.

Individual-Level Dimensions

The individual level of a recruitment program is the most granular and focuses on the personnel who implement program activities and engage in recruitment practices.

Recruiter attributes

Among key recruiter attributes are emotional intelligence, communication skills, cultural competence, strong work ethic, goal-orientation, self-initiative, and belief in the organization.

Recruiter training

Mentorship programs, confidence training, maintenance of knowledge repositories, and technical skills training (e.g. social media management) are all important training components for recruiters.

Recruiter incentives

Professional development opportunities and recognition and award systems can serve as useful ways to encourage recruiter productivity, but most experts did not see these as essential and some believed they could be counterproductive.

Recruiter types

While recruiter types have been identified (e.g., those with more or less experience, "developers" and "closers"), some experts noted the value of capitalizing on the strengths of different recruiters while others did not see such differentiation as important.

Conclusion

Recruitment is a complex process that requires participation at all organizational levels. The findings suggest that multidimensional recruitment programs may be an effective approach to recruitment. However, organizations must consider their needs, recruitment objectives, and constraints when developing or refining their recruitment programs. Tailoring and adapting program elements to fit each organization's unique characteristics can set them up for success in their recruiting efforts.

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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 Michigan State University to promote evidence-based police workforce research, strategy, and operations. It aims to advance police workforce knowledge and its application through research and its dissemination, including practitioner partnerships.