

New Recruits: What Factors Decide Their Choice of an Employing Agency?

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Abstract

This paper researched the difficulties that police agencies have in locating and recruiting qualified police applicants. It looked at the various factors that are involved in affecting the police recruitment process. The majority of today's police recruits are from generation X. This paper examined this generation to determine what motivates them in an attempt to change the recruitment process to attract these applicants. Also examined were the current recruitment methods that are being used and looked at the future of recruiting. Police recruits were surveyed at the Broward County Police Academy. This survey determined what the major deciding factors are to make these recruits select an employing agency.

Introduction

Law enforcement agencies across the nation are experiencing the challenge of recruiting qualified applicants to fill vacancies. There are a variety of reasons why qualified recruits are scarce. There is a smaller work force with stronger competition from private business. There is a need to examine the current approach in recruitment to make sure it targets the pool of recruits available. An examination on what motivates new recruits is essential in developing appropriate recruitment techniques. I will attempt to answer the following questions. Why are quality recruits hard to find? What are the qualities of generation X which is the generation that the majority of new recruits come from? What motivates new recruits to pick the agencies that they do? What are the current recruitment methods and are they effective? What methods should be used in the future to recruit new officers?

Literature Review

Influences on Recruitment

In *Police Officer Recruitment: a Public Sector Crisis* written by William Woska he looks at the numerous factors that affect finding qualified police applicants. The most glaring influence is the fact that the current workforce made up of 80 million baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are retiring and are being replaced by a much smaller work force of generation X that is around 30 million. This smaller pool of potential applicants is further reduced by young people who ordinarily would be attracted to policing now serving in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Currently many police agencies require applicants to have a certain number of college credits or a degree. These better educated workers are being lured into more lucrative jobs in private industry. The negative publicity of high profile police incidents and the increasing

public scrutiny are causing potential candidates to look elsewhere for a job. (Woska, 2006)

Jon Le Sage in writing *Recruiting Replacements* examines the reasons why qualified recruits are hard to find. The recruitment process itself can be a reason to discourage potential candidates as it is usually lengthy and demanding. The recruitment pool is also shrunk by the standards required for the job. Police agencies have to find people with a relatively unblemished background, a sound work ethic and the ability to work in a high stress position. These candidates will then face a lengthy training period before they will be able to function under the job description that they were hired to do. Shift work is also less appealing to the new generation X recruits who are motivated by spending time with family and friends and not willing to work odd hour shifts or weekends. (LeSage, 2005)

In *Police, firefighters challenge residency rules; "Recruitment and retention nightmare"* written by Kevin Johnson he explores the pros and cons of agencies with residency rules. A residency rule is a law that requires that the officers that work for a particular agency live in the same community that they serve. In some cities it forces the officers to live in a high-income neighborhood that they can't afford. In other incidents officers are forced to live in lower-income communities that sometimes don't have good quality schools. This also becomes a concern to officers whose spouses work in a different city causing them to have a long commute. This rule causes a recruitment nightmare by losing qualified officers to agencies that don't have these tight restrictions. (Johnson, 2006)

Generation X

Gord Schumacher the author of *Qualities of Police Leadership: A Snapshot on leading Generation X* examines the characteristics and attitudes of this generation. Generation X is the group of people born between 1965 and 1985. Where baby boomers focused their life on their job generation X wants a job that includes time for family and activities. The motivation for this group is to know that their ideas are valued and their input is appreciated. In police agencies not everything can be shared and some things need to be confidential, however management behind closed doors will build mistrust with this group. They are not afraid to question and challenge management which makes it important for managers to have an open dialogue with subordinates in order to build trust and convince this generation of employees that they are important and part of a team. Another valued trait that this generation looks for is honesty. Managers need to be honest and use open two way communication to instill confidence and self-esteem. If a generation X officer feels that the leader is not being honest it can easily develop into an "us versus them" mentality. This is the type of generation that needs to be led by example.

The generation X officer will emulate you as a leader and the qualities of openness and honesty will help you be respected as an individual. (Schumacher, 2003)

In *The New Officer: The Next Generation* author Tommy Carswell examines what motivates generation X. Generation X is not committed to staying at one job for their entire career as their parents did. Generation X employees feel comfortable that they will be able to find another job and tend to stay single longer which enables them the freedom to move around and test the job market. This generation deems the amount of

off duty time, how much money they make and the amount of training that they receive as a gauge on how successful they are. The more training a generation X recruit receives and the quality of that training are good motivational tools to encourage that employee to stay with an agency longer. This generation also rates being involved in things with a voice on how things get done and recognition for their accomplishments very high. As managers, providing these employees with timely encouragement on things done well and using positive reinforcement to correct mistakes can work towards keeping an employee of this generation motivated and with enough job satisfaction to be a long term employee. (Carswell, 2002)

Recruitment methods

Jon LeSage the author of *Recruiting Replacements* examines the methods different agencies use to recruit new officers. Every agency has different methods at how they approach recruiting. Some agencies use monetary incentives to attract new recruits. This can sometimes pit agency against agency. In Texas, Dallas, Austin and Houston are in a bidding war attempting to attract certified police officers. Houston offered \$7,000 as a bonus for veteran police officers while Dallas offered \$10,000 to hire officers with prior experience. San Diego California County Sheriffs office offered \$500 to county employees as a finder's fee for anyone that they bring in that gets hired by the department. This same agency gives a \$5,000 bonus to certified officers from other agencies that transfer to their department. In Lexington Kentucky they provide new officers with up to \$7,400 for a down payment on a home. King County, Washington provided deputies with 40 hours of vacation time if they brought someone in that gets hired as a deputy. (Woska, 2006)

Some agencies have to first repair a tarnished image to high profile negative media events that involve their agency. The Los Angeles Police Department was tasked with this problem and hired a public relations and advertising agency, Weber Shandwick to help solve their problem.

The ad agency that is best known for its "Got Milk?" commercials provided the Los Angeles Police Department with a brand image that gave the department a consistent look which is displayed in their printed materials and on their web site. They also recommended that the department produce a series of movie trailers that are shown in the movie theaters in the counties around Los Angeles. The trailers show a positive image of a male and female partner as they carry out their daily duties. This trailer is perfect to target the audience of generation X who grew up watching action movies and playing video games. In addition to the movie trailers the LAPD is still recruiting with the traditional methods of attending job fairs, college career days as well as using print material and the internet. (LeSage, 2005)

Future recruitment

In *Using Visual Technology for Recruitment* written by Gene Ellis, Greg Marshall, Chris Skinner and Gary Smith they examine recruitment methods for the future. With the new recruits coming from generation X that are known to be technology savvy, future recruiting will need to rely on emerging technology to project their image and get their message to this targeted audience. One of the obstacles is that the recruitment

process has to overcome the stereotypes created by the news, movies and television that portray police officers being the confrontational crime fighter. This usually draws applicants that are attracted to the power rather than the preferred candidate with people skills that can deal with the emotional issues today's police are more likely to encounter. The use of the internet is a good method; however it only targets people who are searching because they are already interested in police work. If a web site is used as a recruitment tool, photographs on the site should be carefully selected to accurately portray the department's image. The department's mission, history, minimum qualifications for employment and expectations of officers should be on the site in order to send a clear message on the desired traits of an applicant and to dissuade undesirable persons from applying. In Portland Oregon the department requires applicants to apply only over the internet. This acts as a screening process showing an applicant's abilities with a computer. In order to continue to be competitive, police agencies will need to continue to utilize emerging technologies as a recruitment tool. (Ellis, Marshall, Skinner &, Smith, 2005)

Methods

I chose to conduct a survey to collect the original data for my research project. (Appendix D) I surveyed new recruits attending the Broward County police academy. The population in Broward County is estimated to be 1,787,636. The police academy holds 10 to 12 classes a year. The Broward academy graduates approximately 300 cadets yearly. The majority of these recruits were sponsored by an agency that hires them prior to the start of the academy. There were 112 recruits surveyed with 100% return on the survey. The focus of the survey was to find out what the motivating factors were that made them choose the department that they decided to work for. They were asked to rate on a scale from 5 to 1 with 5 being the most important different qualities of an agency that they most desired. Some of the qualities they were asked about were salary, chance for rapid advancement, and amount of specialized units. The questions on demographics involve sex, age and prior experience in either police, military or corrections. At the end of this research project I was able to identify the most desirable traits of an agency that attracts new recruits. This information will be a valuable tool for our agency to focus our recruitment methods in the appropriate direction.

Results

The following is a break down on the demographics of those surveyed. 83% were male and 17% were female. 52% were between 19 to 26 years old, 19% were between 27 and 30 years old and 29% were 31 years old and older. (See Appendix B) Among those surveyed 9% had prior police experience, 9% had prior corrections experience and 28% had prior military experience. The item that was selected the most by those surveyed as being the most important reason for selecting the agency they were with was benefits such as insurance and a retirement plan, with 71% rating this with a 5.(Most important) This was followed by the departments reputation with 50% selecting this as a 5. Perks such as a take home car and cell phones were selected by 47% and

salary was selected by 46%. The least important item to those surveyed was available housing in the area with 21% rating this at a 1. (Least important) The survey also had an area for those surveyed to check off an “other” with space to explain in case there was another motivational factor that I had not thought of to put on the survey. 28% of those surveyed chose to select “other” with the responses varied. Four persons stated that equipment issued by the agency was important. Several mentioned that the way they were treated during the hiring process and the friendliness of other officers was important. Several had mentioned the department’s use of comparative compliance was important and one simply stated that they believed the agency they chose was the best in the county. (See Appendix C for a breakdown of importance)

Appendix D is a copy of the survey and Appendix A shows how each question was answered.

The following chart depicts how those surveyed rated each category

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Question 1: Salary | 52 | 44 | 10 | 3 | 3 |
| Question 2: Chance for rapid advance | 40 | 48 | 19 | 2 | 3 |
| Question 3: Amount of specialized units | 36 | 44 | 26 | 3 | 3 |
| Question 4: Location of agency | 45 | 27 | 29 | 8 | 3 |
| Question 5: Perks (i.e. Take home car, cell phone) | 54 | 30 | 22 | 2 | 4 |
| Question 6: First to offer you a job | 45 | 25 | 27 | 10 | 5 |
| Question 7: Departments reputation | 57 | 37 | 13 | 2 | 3 |
| Question 8: Size of Department | 23 | 43 | 32 | 8 | 6 |
| Question 9: Available housing in the area | 7 | 12 | 42 | 27 | 24 |
| Question 10: The Departments recruiting methods | 21 | 21 | 41 | 19 | 10 |
| Question 11: Benefits, insurance and retirement plan | 80 | 20 | 9 | 2 | 1 |
| Question 12: The hiring process | 36 | 33 | 28 | 6 | 9 |
| Question 13: Other | | | | | |

Discussion

It is apparent from the results of this survey that security is very important to this group of new recruits by the fact that they rated insurance benefits and a retirement plan as one of the most important motivators for them to choose the agency that they chose. Although this generation is thought to have a "live for the day" type of attitude it is refreshing to see that they are thinking ahead and planning for their future. This group also takes pride in themselves and their department and rated the reputation of the department as the second most important motivator for them to choose the agency that they chose. This group obviously wants to define their identity by teaming up with a department that is highly regarded by the community and other agencies. The third most important motivator was job perks such as a take home car and cellular phones. I have seen through my research that this is very indicative of the group that we are trying to recruit, the generation X's. This generation is very fond of new technology and will seek out a department that offers them the latest innovations. An agency that strives to provide their officers with the latest tools can also affect their reputation in a positive manner which is a high motivator for this group. The fact that salary was the fourth most important factor kind of caught me by surprise as I thought it would be rated higher. The new recruits hold salary as an important factor but obviously consider security and pride more important motivators. The least important factor to this group was available housing in the area. This did not come as a surprise as the majority of those surveyed, (52%), were between the ages of 19 and 26 years old. My research into this generation shows that they tend to live at home longer. This would then logically explain why they were not concerned about available housing in the area. The generation who took this survey has grown to expect all the comforts of home to continue up to and including the time they are married and even with children. The Baby boomer generation that was brought up to believe never to trust anyone over 30 is now over 60 and see their children in an almost Peter Pan state of never growing up. The children are quite content to stay in their parent's house until their parents die or move into a senior community. By doing this they reap the benefits of all their parents hard work and gain a single family house in a market that precludes first time home buyers from entering the market. The parents have also accepted the practice and are willing to assist their children in achieving the American Dream. This is the first generation where the children will not do better financially then the previous generations due to the housing market, global economy, recession etc...This is the first time since World War II were it is not expected that this generation can expect to own their own home and all the comforts that are associated to it.

When new recruits look at the survey, they on the most part realize their parents will be around as some form of safety net. There by they can be more selfish with their desires for benefits and job perks. They are better educated and have a philosophy of "what can you do for me". They have seen what loyalty offers the employee (e.g. Enron) and as a result shop around for the best fit in an organization and are not willing to invest a lifetime of commitment. They are willing to shop around and even change careers on a more frequent basis than generations in the past. This is an MTV

generation who demands immediate gratification and if it is not supplied they simply turn the channel and tune into something else or in this case some other agency.

The second least important motivator for the group I surveyed was recruiting methods with 9% selecting this as the least important motivator. This may also be the result of a generation brought up on mass media advertising. They have been blasted their whole lives by advertising from every product imaginable on television and the internet. They may be suspicious of a polished promotion of a department and what it has to offer and prefer to test the true product for what it is. They evidently do their own research and look at factors that are important to them such as benefits. They also ask questions and talk to peers and current employees with a department to get their own grasp on what that department's reputation may be about.

Recommendations

In response to the survey information there are a few suggestions and ideas that can be implemented to increase recruitment strategies to meet the needs/ desires of the potential applicants to the agency.

Economic challenges have necessitated the needs for governmental entities to examine benefits to include retirement and medical insurance, which in most cases are the two most costly line items. The trend in businesses is to move away from defined pension benefits and institute employer/ employee contribution saving plans. The current trend is to move towards these retirement plans; a majority of the police/ public safety agencies have remained in the defined pension plan. It is my suggestion to move away from the defined pension plan and institute an employer/ employee funded pension plan (401k). This type of pension plan plays into the new generation thought process increasing their ability to remain portable, leaving them in greater control of the future. I mention this since one of the other concerns identified in this survey was the department's perks, including take home cars and electronic communication devices (cell phones).

Though medical insurance remained important in this survey, the rising cost prohibits long-term suggestions and changes. Lastly, the reputation of the agency lies within itself however by looking at an important item among those surveyed a department's perks can build upon its reputation by what they provide for those that work for them. Developing your employees through progressive growth to include succession leadership and advance training remains the key to a healthy agency.

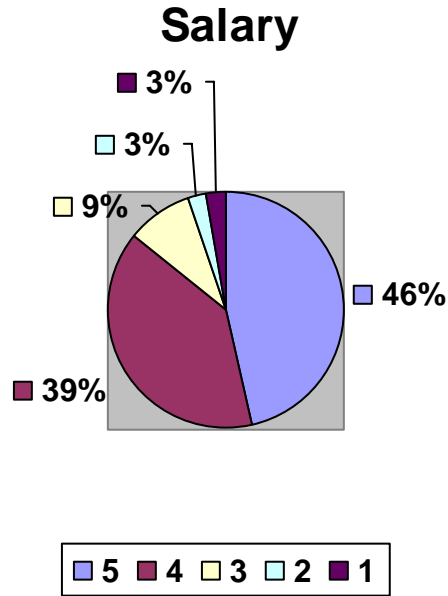
Captain Brian Hager has been with the Plantation Police Department since 1986. He has supervised several areas to include Street Crimes Unit, SWAT Team, Canine Unit and Traffic Unit. Brian is currently a District Commander of Road Patrol Operations for half of the city of Plantation. Brian is pursuing his Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice Administration from Columbia Southern University.

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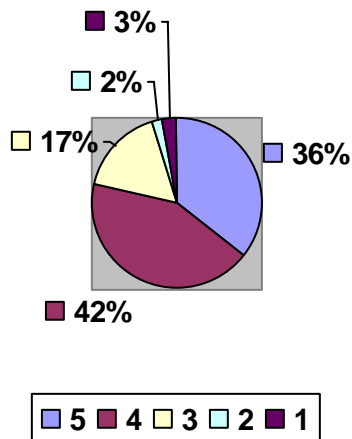
APPENDIX A

The following pie charts depict how the recruits answered each question on the survey.



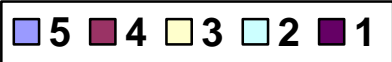
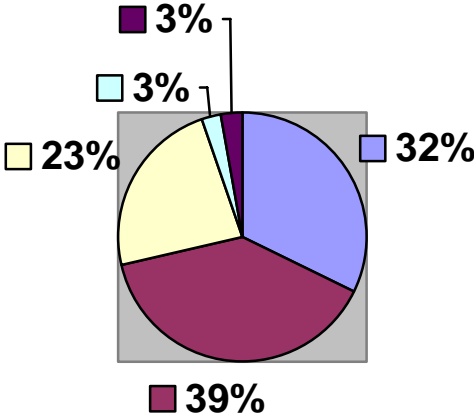
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Chance for Advancement



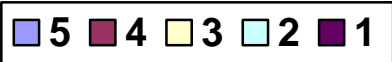
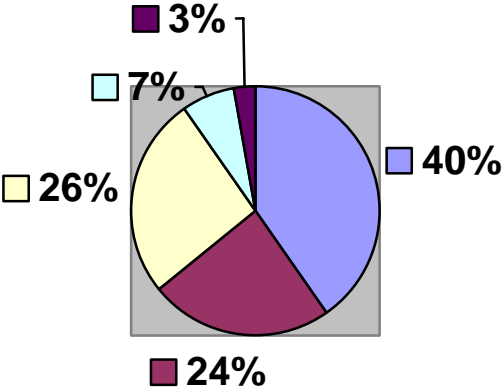
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Amount of specialized units



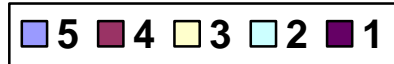
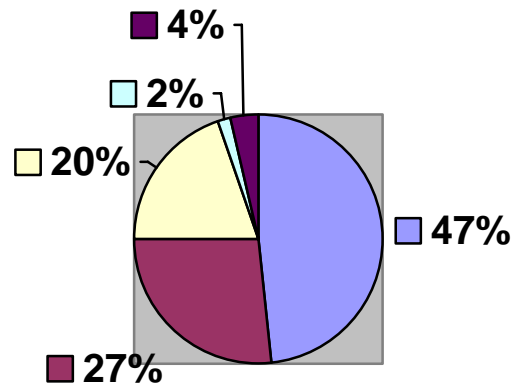
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Location of Agency



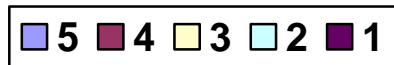
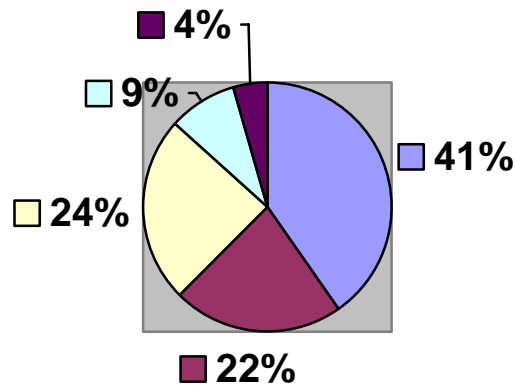
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Perks (ie. take home car, cell phone)



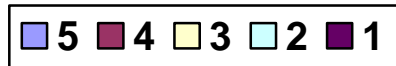
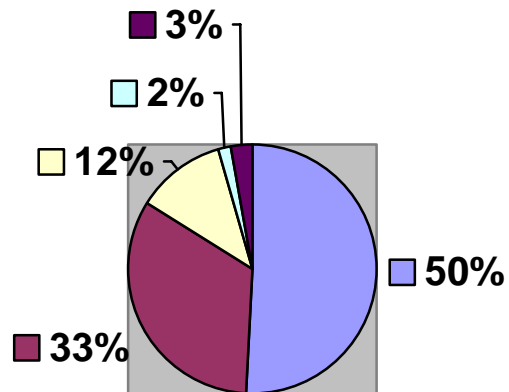
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First to offer a job



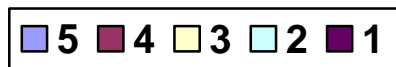
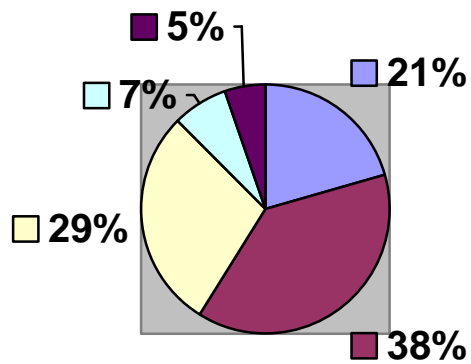
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Departments reputation



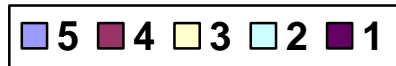
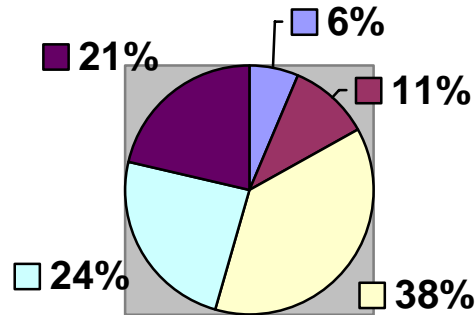
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Size of the Department



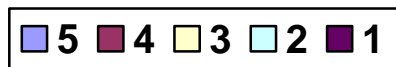
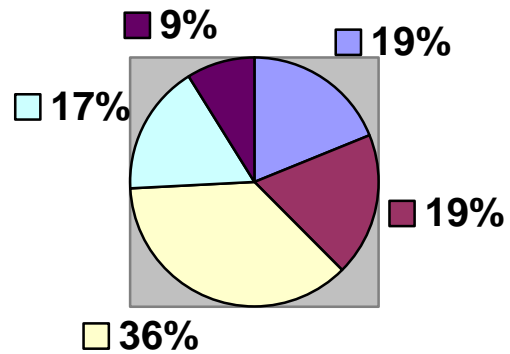
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Available Housing in the area



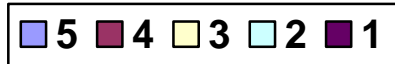
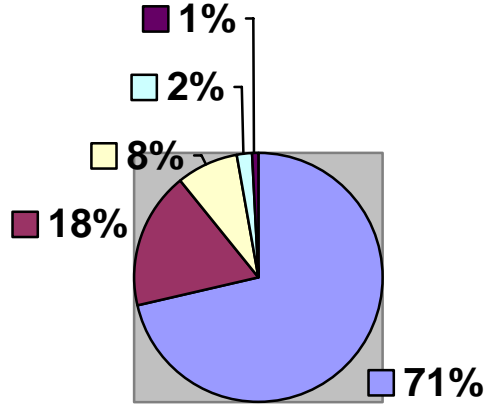
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Recruiting Methods



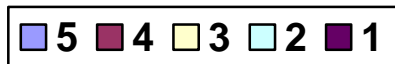
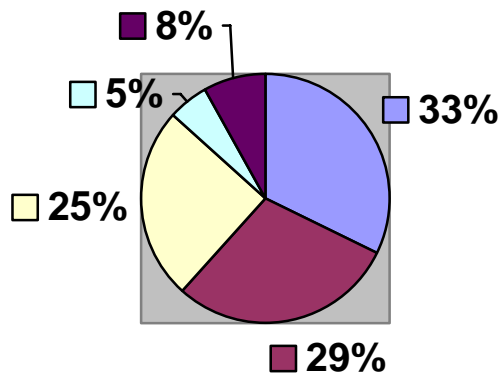
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Benefits



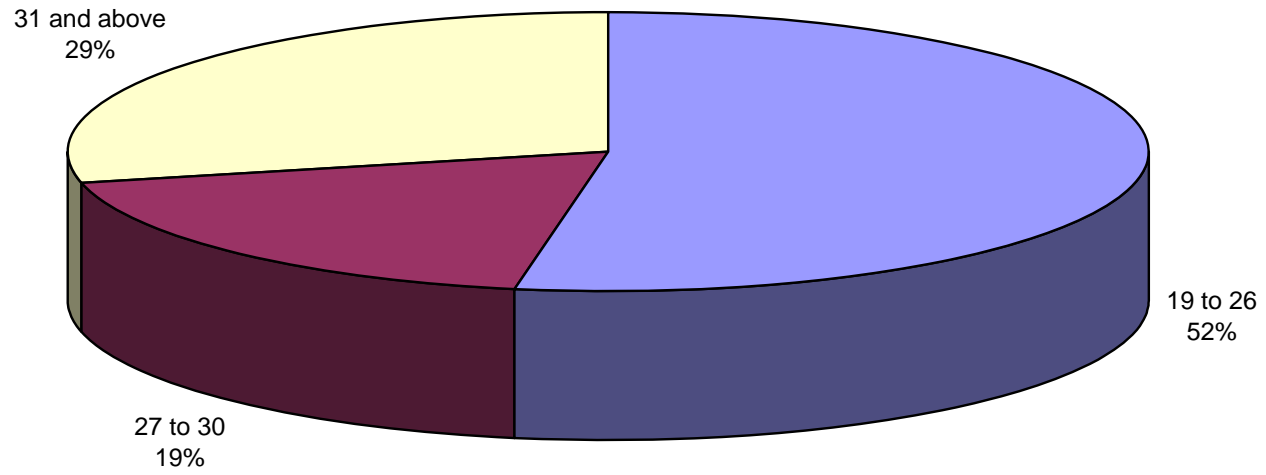
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Hiring Process

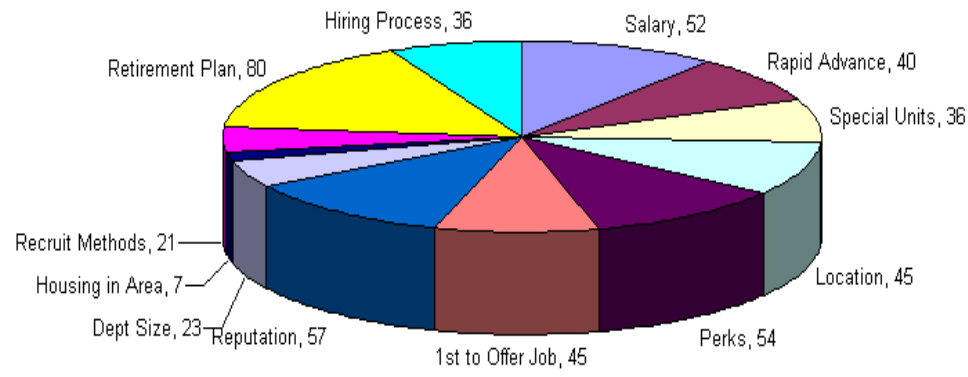


5 Very important – 1 Not very important

AGE - Appendix B



Very Important- Appendix C



List from Most Important to Least Important

1. Retirement Plan
2. Department Reputation
3. Job Perks
4. Salary
5. Location and First to Offer Job
6. Rapid Advance
7. Specialized Units and Hiring Process
8. Department Size
9. Recruiting Methods
10. Housing in the Area

Appendix D

The purpose of this survey is to determine what factors a new recruit considers important when selecting an agency for employment.

Please indicate the importance of each factor listed, 5 is very important please see the scale below.

Please circle the number that most appropriately represents your opinion:

Very Important= 5 → 4 → 3 → 2 → 1 = Not Very Important.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Salary | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2) Chance for rapid advancement | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3) Amount of specialized units | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4) Location of agency | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5) Perks (i.e. take home car, cell phone) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6) First to offer you a job | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7) Departments reputation | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8) Size of the Department | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9) Available housing in the area | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10) The Departments recruiting methods | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11) Benefits, insurance and retirement plan | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12) The hiring process | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13) Other, briefly explain_____ | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Please fill in the appropriate circle

- 14) Your sex? Male Female
- 15) How old are you? 19-26 27- 30 31 and above
- 16) Do you have prior police experience? Yes No
- 17) Do you have prior corrections experience? Yes No
- 18) Do you have prior military experience? Yes No