

# Are Explorer Programs Effective Recruiting Tools for Law Enforcement Agencies?

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## *Abstract*

*One of the greatest challenges facing law enforcement agencies today is the recruitment of qualified applicants. Many law enforcement agencies have a law enforcement exploring program in place at their agencies that could be used to obtain applicants. Information was obtained from various law enforcement agencies as to whether they recruit or hire from their law enforcement exploring program and to what extent. Information was also obtained from law enforcement officers who were previous explorers to find out how much law enforcement exploring influenced their decision to enter law enforcement as a career.*

## Introduction

Exploring is a national career education program for young people, between the ages of 14 and 21. It is affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America, Learning for Life division and has been around since the 1960's. Each group of young people is called a post and is assisted by adult leaders called advisors. Each law enforcement post is affiliated with one or more law enforcement department or agencies. There are currently around 50,000 young men and women involved with around 4,000 law enforcement explorer posts throughout the United States. These include Police, Sheriffs, federal agencies, universities, and corporate law enforcement posts. (J. Kaminski, personal communication, September 7, 2006.)

Exploring's purpose is to provide experiences to help young people mature and to prepare them to become responsible and caring adults. The program also has five areas of emphasis: career opportunities, leadership experience, character education, citizenship, and life skills. There are many different types of vocational exploring posts that include aviation, law enforcement, skilled trades, business, health, law, communications, science, engineering, social services, fire and emergency services, and arts and humanities. Each law enforcement post operates their program a little differently according to the agency needs and resources.

Prior research has pointed to many factors that affect young people in regards to career decisions. One of these factors is the amount of information and understanding they have about potential careers. According to a recent Canadian survey, many students are undecided about careers because they lack information about the workplace and do not understand the link between academic subject and the requirements of work. The Educational Resources

Information Center (ERIC) suggests career education with the community and employers taking a major role. (Marceau, 1995, p. 2)

Another factor is experience. Students need to have exposure to the career and job skills to gain the experience needed to select a career. Students ages 13-18 surveyed for the year 2003-2004 say that their greatest influence when it comes to choosing careers is their own experience. (Hart, 2003)

Of course peers and family influence young people in career decisions. Studies find that interactions with peers focusing on career-related issues are correlated with more information-seeking behaviors. Friends are found to be an important role in the information gathering process in activities focusing on career exploration. Parents, too play an important role in the information gathering process. (Kracke, 2002, p. 27)

Young people have limited knowledge of occupations. Tools exist to help young people identify vocations that may be attractive to them. The Armed Services Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) is one of these tools. The ASVAB helps young people investigate occupations for which they show interest and ability. This form of career exploration or development enhances knowledge of the self and knowledge of the environment. Assessments such as this are important and necessary to help with career indecision inherent in young people. (Baker, 2002)

Career maturity is defined as the individual's ability to make appropriate career choices, including awareness of what is required to make a career decision and the degree to which one's choices are both realistic and consistent over time. Career role models play an important role in the development of career maturity. Studies show that children can benefit from relationships with adults who are successful in their areas of interest. These adults may be present in children's lives as mentors, role models, or heroes and heroines. These studies show that along with work experience, career role models are more important predictors of career maturity, than parental involvement, academic motivation, or self-confidence. (Flouri, 2002)

Work related skills are important in career selection. These skills can be obtained through part time work or through career explorations that teach job skills. Adolescents who reported that they had computing skills, work experience, strong job skills, and a career role model tended to score higher on career maturity. As previously stated, young people say their greatest influence when it comes to choosing careers is their own experience. (Flouri, 2002)

Support during the transition from school to work is important. Many work-bound youth struggle and report they have little direct help or support as they attempt to navigate the school-to-work transition. These young people often experience extended periods of floundering after high school characterized by drifting at jobs without opportunity for advancement and /or general despair. (Rojewski & Kim, 2003)

Participation in career exploration could be the key. In a study of high school career exploration programs by Visher and Bhandari (2004) it was learned that career exploration programs are improving the future prospects of a large and diverse group of high school students by increasing the likelihood that they will take college entrance and advanced placement exams, graduate and go on

to postsecondary education. It also found that participation in career exploration programs expanded substantially between 1997 and 2000 and that students from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of achievement participate in career exploration programs. Their study included several different types of career exploration programs that were administered through the students' schools. These programs included: Career majors, cooperative education, Internship/apprenticeship, job shadowing, mentoring, school sponsored enterprise, and tech prep. How best to incorporate career exploration activities into the high school curriculum remains the subject of significant debate among educators. The previously mentioned explorer program, which is conducted after school hours, could be categorized as internship/apprenticeship, job shadowing, and/or mentoring.

A Gallup Youth Survey conducted on more than 1,000 youth ages 13-17 listed the top job picks as follows: 1. Teacher, 2. Doctor, 3. Lawyer, 4. Sport field, 5. Science/biology, 6. Architecture, 7. Business, 8. Military, 9. Engineer, 10. Nurse. (Top teen choices, 2006, Jan) Law enforcement did not appear in the top ten.

### Problem statement

One of the greatest challenges for law enforcement today is the recruitment of qualified applicants. Increasing competition, shrinking labor pools, and changes in the attitudes of young people all may be factors in the recruitment problem. Innovative recruitment strategies must be developed in order to attract qualified candidates. The Law Enforcement Explorer program, for young people 14-21 will be examined as a possible tool to assist in recruiting and retaining future law enforcement officers.

Questions to answer: Is law enforcement a career choice for young people entering the job market for the first time? Does the law enforcement exploring program enhance the chances that law enforcement will be a career choice? Are Police explorers programs a good source of recruits? Do agencies involve the department head, recruiting officer, or explorer advisors in a coordinated recruiting effort?

### Hypothesis

It is universally accepted in law enforcement agencies throughout the country that there are fewer qualified applicants coming to police work. My hypothesis is that by having an active law enforcement exploring program, police departments can positively influence young people to enter law enforcement and thus it can be an effective recruiting tool. This would include encouraging those already interested in law enforcement and also encouraging those that have not thought about law enforcement to consider it as a career. Young people are thinking about careers and jobs very early in their life. From their first "fantasy" jobs to more firm ideas later on, many young people have already selected a career by the time they enter high school. Many factors mentioned in the

previous studies such as lack of information about careers, job experience, peer-related information gathering, and career role models are all elements of a successful exploring program.

## Methods

The purpose of this research is to determine if law enforcement agencies with law enforcement explorer programs are using those programs to seek out candidates for police officer positions and to what extent they provide training and/or incentives. For this information, an electronic survey was used (Appendix A.) This survey included questions as to how many former explorers the agencies employed and how long the agencies had an explorer program. It also asked if agencies recruited from the explorer program, and is exploring mentioned in the agencies recruitment plan. In addition, the survey asked if training or incentives are offered to explorers to encourage them to become police officers. The survey was sent to all law enforcement agencies in Florida with an explorer program that belong to the Florida Association of Police Explorers (FAPE.) Currently there are 50 law enforcement agencies that belong to FAPE that had an electronic mail address in which to send the survey.

The survey sent to FAPE members asked for contact information on law enforcement officers who previously were in an explorer program. Another survey was sent to these police officers. (Appendix B) Information requested from these officers included how much impact the law enforcement explorer program had on their decision to enter law enforcement as a career and whether they have continued to impact future generations by remaining involved with the explorer program as a mentor.

## Findings

The first survey was sent to FAPE members who had an email address available which was 50 agencies. Of these 50 agencies, 18 (36%) responded to the survey. Different size agencies were represented. Of the responses 3 (17%) were from an agency 21-50, 2 (11%) were from an agency 51-100, 2 (11%) were from an agency 101-200, and the majority, 11 (61%) of the responses were from an agency 201 plus. The length of time these agencies had sponsored an explorer post ranged from 1 year to 40 years.

In response to the question of whether their agency employs officers that are former law enforcement explorers, 14 (78%) replied yes and 4 (23%) replied no. The number of former explorers currently employed by these agencies ranged from 1 to 30 plus.

Several survey questions were asked in order to determine what length agencies with explorer posts were going to in order to recruit from their explorers. (50%) stated that they did not actively recruit from their explorer post and (50%) stated that they did recruit from explorers. (61%) stated that exploring was not mentioned in the agency's recruitment plan and (33%) stated that it was. When asked if the agencies offered any incentives to encourage law enforcement

explorers to become full time law enforcement officers, (67%) replied they did not and (39%) replied they did. When asked what type of incentives they offered several were listed. These included various scholarships such as scholarships to the police academy, including a paid position while at the academy. Also mentioned were additional training such as ride-along training programs and summer volunteer programs to encourage entry into full time law enforcement.

From the above survey a list of law enforcement officers who were previously explorers was obtained. A second survey was sent to these officers via email. Of these surveys, 11 responses were returned. Demographics were obtained from the officers who responded. These included both male (73%) and female (27%) with varying degrees of law enforcement experience ranging from 1 to 26 years. The ages of respondents ranged from 23 to 45. Their current positions/rank included deputy, patrol officer, corporal, sergeant, and detective. Their length of time they were active with the law enforcement explorer program ranged from 4 to 7 years.

Questions were asked to determine the influence of the law enforcement explorer program on these respondents. They were first asked how they became interested in the program. These responses included having family or a relative that was in law enforcement, friends at school, an SRO (school resource officer), an explorer recruiting event at school, observing other explorers at civic events, or other explorers recruiting them.

The respondents were asked if they considered law enforcement as a career before becoming an explorer. 64% responded yes and 36% responded no. When asked if they thought they would have entered law enforcement if they had not been in exploring, 55% responded yes and 45% responded no.

When asked if they believed that the law enforcement exploring program taught them skills that gave them an advantage in basic standards all (100%) stated that they believed that it did. Also, when asked if they believed that the program helped them decide to enter law enforcement as a career, all responded yes.

In addition, the former explorers were asked if they have remained involved in their agency's explorer program as a mentor, teacher or trainer, 73% replied yes and 27% replied no.

## Discussion

Many law enforcement agencies currently have explorer programs in place. Some of these posts have been around for many years and are an expected part of the agency. Some of these posts may have been formed by agency heads as a positive activity for young people to get involved in along with the police, similar to PAL or Police Athletic League. In most instances these explorers are used for community service and crime prevention activities. It also appears that most agencies are giving police type training to their explorers.

Many law enforcement agencies are hiring previous explorers. Also many of these agencies are giving incentives such as scholarships, etc in order to encourage these young people to enter law enforcement.

Previous explorers have gone on to become successful law enforcement officers. The program has helped some young people consider law enforcement as a career who stated they would not have considered it before joining explorers. All respondents in this research stated that law enforcement exploring taught them skills that they felt gave them an advantage in basic police standards. All also reported that the program helped them decide to enter law enforcement as a career. Comments from some of the respondents included "I would not be where I am today if it were not for the Explorer program." And "The program is the only reason that I am where I am in my life at such a young age. I would have never been ready to be a deputy at the age of 20 without the explorers."

Data collected in this research suggests that law enforcement exploring could be the innovative recruitment strategy that agencies are looking for to attract qualified applicants. It currently does not appear to be mentioned in most agencies recruitment plans. Higgins (1991) agrees and states: "There should be an easier, less expensive way to attract qualified recruits. In fact, there is. It's called the Law Enforcement Explorer Program and it appeals to motivated young people with solid values who are interested in law enforcement careers." In a study conducted by the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board's Executive Institute titled "Fishing in a shallow pool: police recruitment," the board suggested new strategies in police recruitment due to the shrinking labor pool in law enforcement. This board recommended several strategies including using DARE and school officers to launch a long-term recruitment ideology focused on school children, recruiting through high schools, and implementing Boy Scout Explorer programs in law enforcement. (Jurkanin, Fischer, and Sergevnin)

In order for the explorer program to be an effective recruiting tool, and be a source of potential recruits, the exploring program itself must be successful. Police personnel who run the explorer programs and work with these young people must be motivated and enjoy working with youth. These officers should be volunteers and not assigned there for disciplinary or disability reasons. Successful explorer programs must continually work to recruit motivated youth. Recruiting (explorers and police officers) must be a department-wide function. Any public speaking event is also a recruiting event. The chief, sheriff or other person who speaks to any group needs to include recruiting flyers and comments. (Church) Meaningful training and information about the career of law enforcement must be included in the explorer program in order for the young people to have the information needed to make an informed career decision.

In conclusion, I believe this research has confirmed the usefulness of the exploring program as a potential recruiting tool for law enforcement agencies. Responses by current law enforcement officers who were prior explorers establish that exploring enhances the chances that law enforcement will be a career choice and that the exploring program is a good source of recruits. Agencies with this program already in place should make better use of it through a coordinated agency-wide effort. The law enforcement community as a whole could benefit from the comprehensive use of successful explorer programs. Further research should be conducted to further study the elements of a

successful law enforcement explorer program and how to better use it as a source of recruits.

Captain Kathy McCurdy has been in law enforcement with the Panama City Police Department since 1981. She has worked in several areas to include patrol, investigations and community policing. While in community policing, she worked with the departments' "at risk" youth program called "ASAP". Kathy is currently the Captain of the Support Services Section. She has been involved with the department's explorer program as an advisor since its inception in 1996. Kathy has an Associate's degree in Criminal Justice from Gulf Coast Community College. She is currently pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Criminology from Florida State University, Panama City campus.

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey Questions for agencies:

1. Name of Agency\_\_\_\_\_.
2. How many sworn members does your agency employ? 0-20, 21-50, 51-100, 101-200, 201+
3. How long has your agency sponsored a law enforcement explorer program?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Does your agency provide police related training to explorers?
5. Does your agency currently employ officers that are former law enforcement explorers? If so, how many?
6. Has your agency hired officers directly from your law enforcement explorer program?
7. Does your agency actively recruit officers from your law enforcement explorer program?
8. Is exploring mentioned in your agency's recruitment plan?
9. Does your agency offer any incentives to encourage law enforcement explorers to become full time law enforcement officers? If so, what type? (scholarships, bonuses, etc.)
10. If you indicated yes to question #5, (you employ officers that are former explorers) please provide contact information (email addresses and/or phone numbers preferred) on these officers. This information will be used to conduct a follow up survey with law enforcement officers that previously were explorers.

11. Please use the area below to make any additional comments you wish in reference to the law enforcement explorer program.

## APPENDIX B

Survey #2 for former explorers currently serving as law enforcement officers:

1. How long were you an explorer?
2. How did you first become interested in a law enforcement explorer program?  
(peers, family, media, other)
3. Do you think law enforcement exploring helped you decide to enter law enforcement as a career?
4. Did you consider law enforcement as a career before becoming an explorer?
5. Do you think you would have entered law enforcement if you had not been in law enforcement exploring?
6. Were you taught skills in the law enforcement exploring program that you felt gave you an advantage in the basic standards course?
7. Have you continued your involvement with your agency's law enforcement exploring program since becoming an officer?
8. Your demographics: sex, age, years in law enforcement, rank/position.
9. Please use the area below to make any additional comments you may wish in reference to the law enforcement explorer program including any other person you feel I should contact reference this research.

APPENDIX C  
**SLP#11 Web-based Survey**  
**Law Enforcement Executive Institute**

Greetings,

My name is Kathy McCurdy, and I am a Captain with the Panama City Police Department. I am currently attending the Senior Leadership Program (class#11) presented by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Law Enforcement Executive Institute.

As part of our studies, each of us have been tasked with conducting research on a specific topic. The topic I have chosen to do my research on is identifying police agencies with Police Explorer programs, specifically, agencies who utilize their programs as recruitment tools. I hope this research will identify agencies that recruit from their Explorers, and perhaps those agencies can share strategies with others.

As one method of research, I have chosen is to conduct a web-based (Internet) survey. Simply click on the link below to visit my survey form.

This survey **normally takes less than two minutes** to complete. Your **participation is greatly appreciated**, and each participating agency will receive a copy of the findings if they so desire.

If you do not have time to complete this survey, please forward this email to someone within your agency who does.

Respectfully,

Captain Kathy McCurdy  
Panama City Police Department  
Office Phone: (850) 872-3120  
Fax: (850) 872-3198  
email: kathy.mccurdy@cityofpanamacity.com

**All responses will be kept anonymous!!**

.: » [Click here to access the survey form.](#) « .:

-or-

Copy the following url and paste it into your browser address bar.

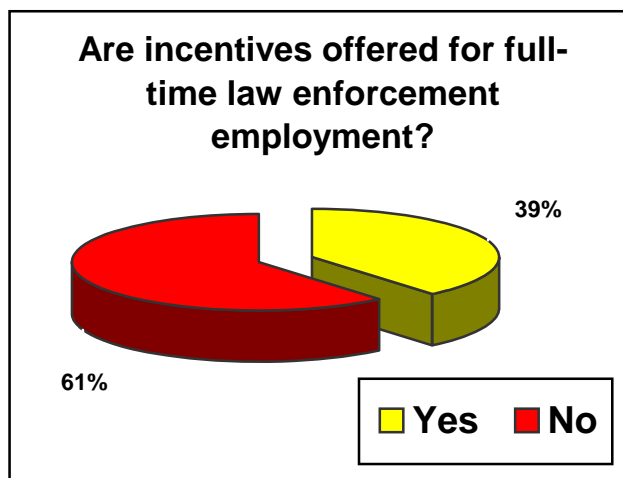
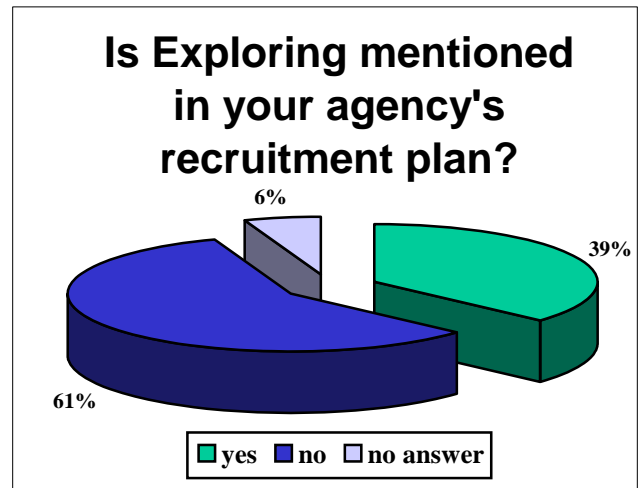
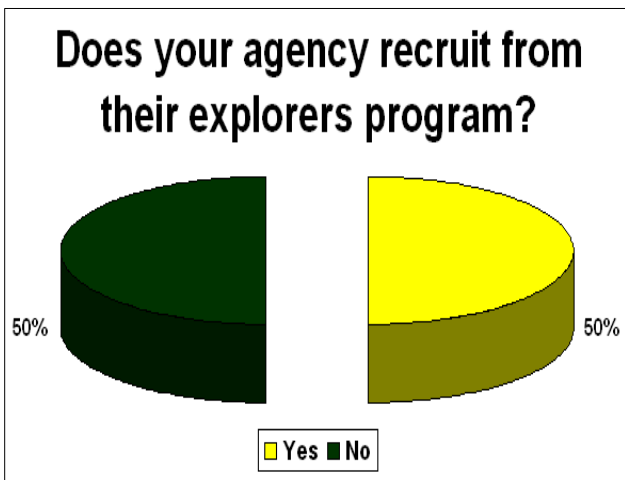
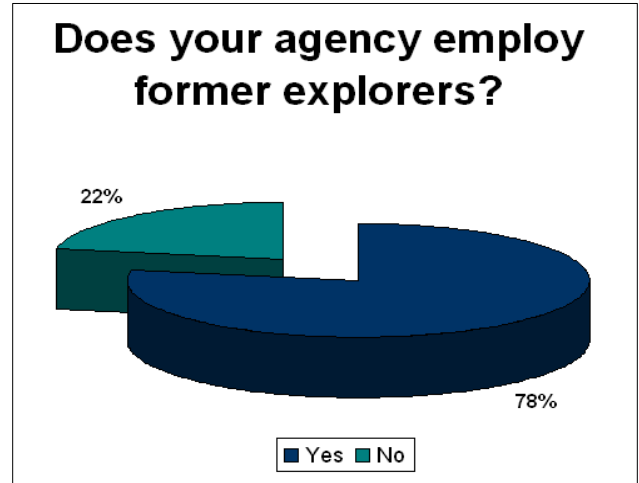
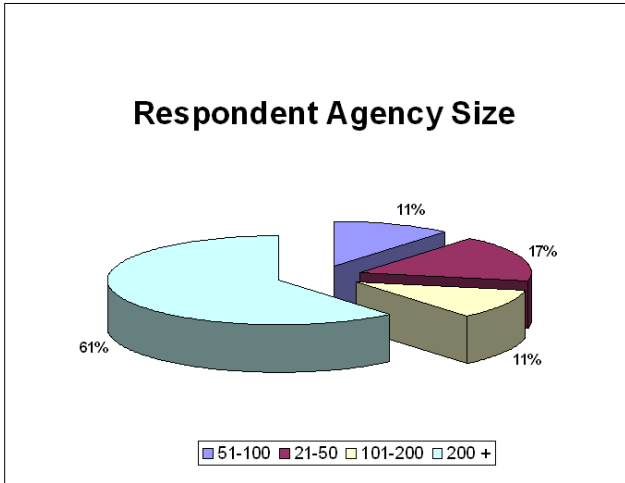
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Appendix D



Appendix D

