

# THE MODEL POLICE OFFICER:

Recruitment, Training, and Community Engagement



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## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This report is the result of research conducted by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), pursuant to an agreement with the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), to gather information from local government leaders and staff, police chiefs, police union representatives, and citizens. The survey targeted communities of varying sizes in different regions of the country to better understand the characteristics sought in the “model” police officer, and to address:

- What is the current state of police officer recruiting?
- Who should jurisdictions recruit?
- How do they reach those candidates?
- How should they conduct the onboarding and training process?
- If their goal is to engage the new recruits with the community, what are the best methods of doing so?

### Methodology

This research began with a survey jointly developed by ICMA and Vera staff. The approach was to identify a sampling of jurisdiction sizes and types in different regions of the country, and to collect responses from a range of staff and community members in each jurisdiction. Specifically, working toward a target of at least 25 jurisdictions spread around ICMA’s Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Mountain Plains, and West Coast regions, jurisdictions were identified to provide representation of small, medium, and large population cohorts, including both cities and counties.

In each jurisdiction, ICMA staff started with a contact in either the city manager/county administrator’s office, police chief’s office, or sheriff’s office, and through that contact, requested a list of 10 individuals:

#### *Staff:*

- Manager/administrator
- Police chief/sheriff
- Human resources/recruiter
- Police officer
- One additional middle-management staff member.

#### *Community members:*

- Chamber of commerce
- Civic association
- Faith community
- Diverse racial/ethnic community
- School district.

The survey was designed to ask a core set of questions of all respondents, with a list of additional questions provided to management, the police chief, and human resources, each specific to their roles in the organization. Each respondent was notified of their selection by the jurisdiction’s primary contact (i.e., manager or chief), and then received an e-mail invitation to respond to the online survey. Responses were collected between January 25 and June 7, 2018.

Since the goal of this project was to get a sense of the state of the practice and possibilities, not to perform a series of parallel, deep-dive studies, the results are discussed by sectors, regions, roles, and demographics, not by the respondents’ names or by communities. Nevertheless, community-specific data analysis may be an area for further investigation, particularly as part of any local strategic planning efforts.

## Respondents

**TABLE 1** Participating Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	State	Population	Respondents
Alexandria	Virginia	155,810	7
Austin	Texas	947,890	9
Brattleboro	Vermont	11,607	6
Choctaw	Oklahoma	12,354	7
Columbus	Ohio	860,090	3
Fayetteville	North Carolina	204,759	6
Genesee County	New York	58,482	5
Gresham	Oregon	111,523	9
Hermiston	Oregon	17,295	9
Lindon	Utah	10,939	9
Maui County	Hawaii	165,386	5
McKinney	Texas	172,298	6
Morgan Hill	California	44,155	9
Nashville-Davidson County	Tennessee	660,388	8
North Liberty	Iowa	18,520	10
Ottawa County	Michigan	282,250	8
Peoria	Illinois	114,265	3
Philadelphia	Pennsylvania	1,567,872	6
Reno	Nevada	245,255	9
Rolla	Missouri	20,075	9
Sacramento	California	495,234	8
San Juan County	New Mexico	115,079	2
Sanford	Florida	58,605	6
Springfield	Missouri	167,319	6
Surprise	Arizona	132,677	10
Takoma Park	Maryland	17,765	8
White House	Tennessee	11,388	8
Worcester	Massachusetts	184,508	2

**TABLE 2** Participation by Population Group

Population	Jurisdictions	Respondents
Over 400,000	5	34
100,000-400,000	12	73
25,000-100,000	3	20
Under 25,000	8	66

The respondents represent each of ICMA's U.S. regions, with approximately 44 percent of each region's respondents representing community members.

Each jurisdiction provided its own list of respondents based on the survey guidelines, and although there was no requirement that these respondents represent a specific mix of gender, racial, or ethnic backgrounds, efforts were made to include a range of diverse com-



**TABLE 3** Participation by Region

Region	Respondents	Percentage of all respondents	Percentage of respondents who are community members
Northeast	27	14%	44%
Southeast	35	18%	49%
Midwest	39	20%	38%
Mountain Plains	43	22%	42%
West Coast	49	25%	45%

munities among the sample set. In some jurisdictions, all 10 individuals completed the survey; in others, they did not. With a total of 193 responses, the average was 6.9 responses per jurisdiction.

Women represent 16 percent and 12 percent, respectively, of the city/county managers and police chiefs responding; women represent 35 percent of all survey respondents. Regarding racial or ethnic diversity among city/county managers and police chiefs, 12 percent of respondents are either African American or Hispanic. Racial and ethnic breakdowns were not requested of the individual community members, but of all survey respondents, 66 percent are from a jurisdiction that is at least 10 percent Hispanic and 68 percent are from a jurisdiction that is at least 15 percent non-Caucasian.

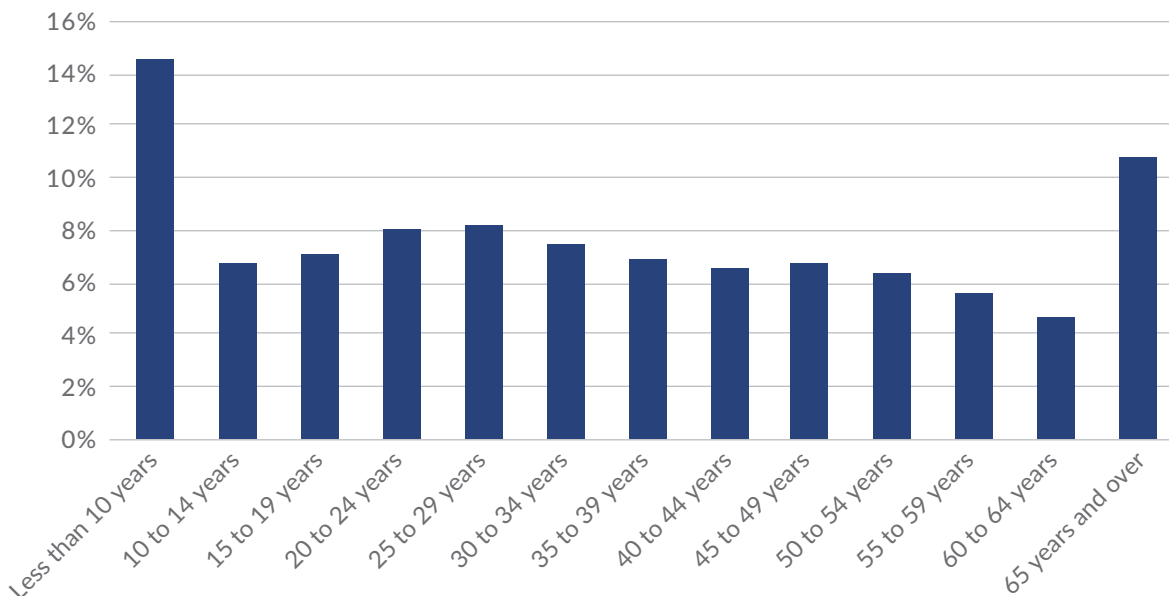
While the respondents represent a variety of government types, the lines between those types are not

always distinct. For example, Alexandria, Nashville, and Philadelphia are typically thought of as cities, but they also carry out many county functions within their territories. For a clearer distinction between the nature of the jurisdictions and the issues they may face, it may be more instructive to consider the population density, or people per square mile, as this may better differentiate urban, suburban, and rural areas.

**TABLE 4** Participation by Population Density

Population density (people per square mile)	Respondents	Percentage
Over 4,000	40	21%
2,000-4,000	54	28%
1,000-2,000	58	30%
Under 1,000	41	21%

**FIGURE 1** Age Distribution of Resident Populations of Jurisdictions Participating



A full range of U.S. Census data was also collected for each jurisdiction, including age, education, poverty rate, and racial and ethnic makeup of the local population.

Where there are distinctive data points by age, race, ethnicity, region, or other characteristics, those are discussed in more detail below.

Unless otherwise noted, each of the figures presented below contains data for all respondents.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Police recruitment has followed varying trends over the years. Often, it has operated on a “build it and they will come” model, in which minimal advertising has been met with a flood of applicants and jurisdictions have had the ability to choose among many qualified applicants. Even where civil service tests might cull that field further, the overall numbers still provided a sufficient supply of recruits.

In the current period of low unemployment, however, competition with the private sector, as well as

societal changes in the perception of policing and of public service generally, may be combining to decrease that supply. A recent workforce study noted that the percentage of state and local governments rating police officers as “hard to recruit” positions has grown from 3.3 percent in 2009 to 26.5 percent in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Among the respondents to this survey, the average vacancy rate in the police department is 7 percent, which means that authorized positions may be going unfilled.

Given that, it is important to consider how to carry out a successful recruitment process by finding the right matches for the jurisdiction’s organizational culture and priorities.

### Priorities, Characteristics, and Skills

In the questions that follow, respondents were asked to rate the importance of a series of activities or priorities, with 10 representing very important, and 1 representing not at all important.

Of these activities, some are what might be considered the meat and potatoes of policing, namely

**FIGURE 2** Model Police Officer Priorities, Characteristics, and Skills



1 State and Local Government Workforce: 2018 Data and 10 Year Trends, Center for State and Local Government Excellence, 2018.



reducing crime (8.97) or direct patrols (7.94). Others might fall into the categories of community-oriented policing (e.g., building community trust and foot patrol) or the broken windows approach (e.g., responding to code violations or broken streetlights). In the latter case, attention is paid to seemingly minor infractions that may either be harbingers of larger issues or signal a level of toleration of inappropriate behavior that encourages more of the same).

The highest rating was afforded to building community trust. Some might view this as a softer, non-professional goal, and attribute the score to responses by civilian community members. However, this priority was actually rated highest by managers/CAOs (9.92), followed by human resources (9.81) and police chiefs (9.67), with the community respondents rating it lowest, at a still considerable 9.31.

The importance noted on the graph may be reflective of the importance of the issues themselves or of the perception that those are or are not policing matters. For example, while broken streetlights may contribute to crime, some in the community may perceive that to be more a matter for public works or utilities staff response rather than police involvement. There is, in fact, a differential among respondents to that question, with police staff rating it slightly more important than community members (4.35 vs. 3.93), but both rated it considerably lower than other issues.

A much wider disparity can be seen on the topic of foot patrols, where the average rating was 6.86. Understandably, those in areas with low population density rated this of lesser importance (5.55), as it would be impractical to use foot patrols, for instance, in larger or rural areas. This same issue was also the one with the highest differential from the mean – an importance rating of 8.37 from respondents in communities

where 30 percent or more of the population is African American. This may reflect a greater desire for one-on-one relationship-building between police officers and members of minority communities.

Responding to accidents was rated as more important in jurisdictions with low population density. This may be a function of crime reduction being a higher priority in areas of higher population density, with the two varying inversely. (See Table 5.)

None of this is to imply that because a particular activity received a lower rating that it should be discontinued. Rather, it may be that in interacting with the community, police departments need to communicate more effectively why some tasks rated lower by community members may, in fact, be important. Furthermore, where there is consensus that some aspects of policing—like building community trust—are a higher priority, those might be considered more formally in the structuring of a recruiting process.

### Skills and Characteristics by Position

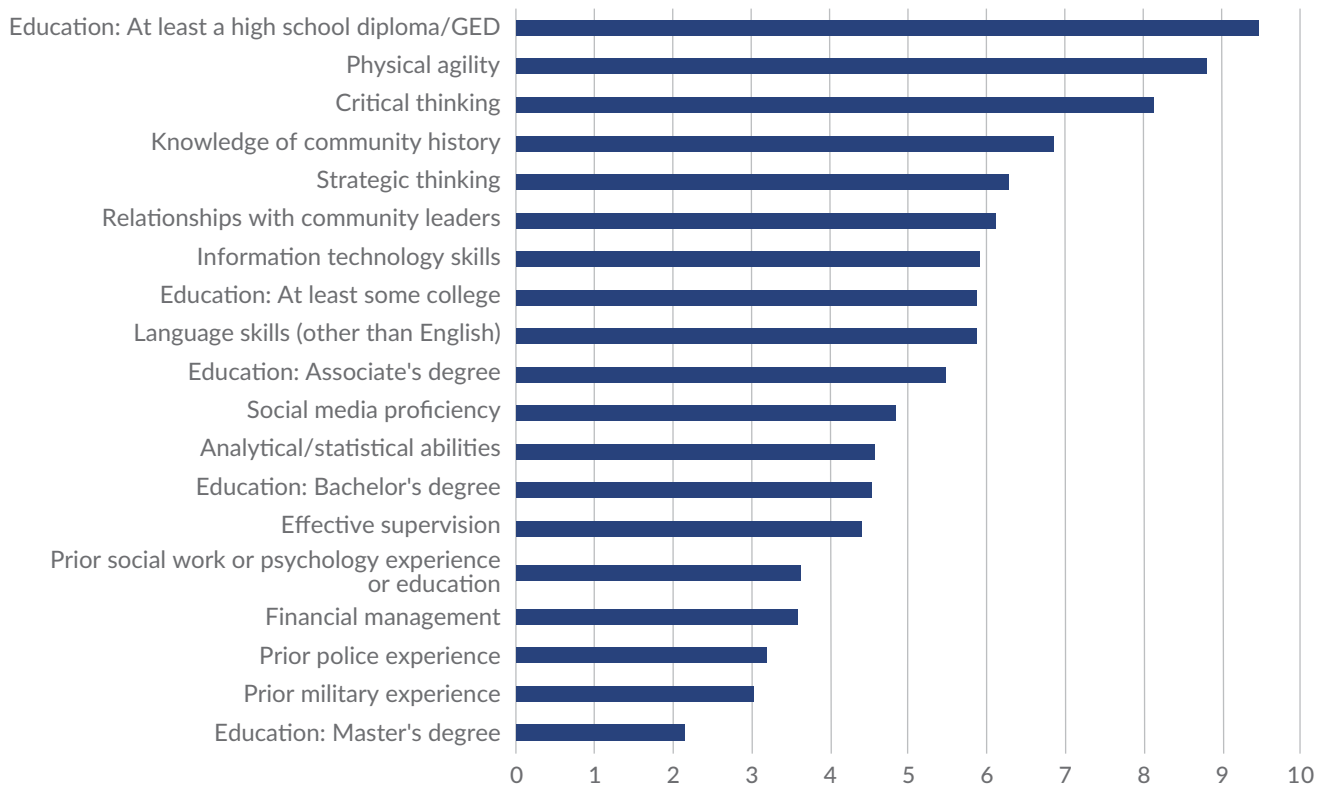
Respondents were asked about the importance of various skills, education, and experience that may be found among successful incumbents at various levels within a police department. These are presented individually here for executive management (e.g., chiefs, assistant chiefs, captains), middle management (e.g., lieutenants, sergeants), and police officers.

Universally, the highest priority is at least a high school diploma or GED. The lowest priority is prior military experience. This is not to say that those from the military are not recruited for the force, just that such experience is not deemed a prerequisite. Beyond that, there is an apparent hierarchy of importance regarding additional education, with most perceiving it to be more important for managers than for officers.

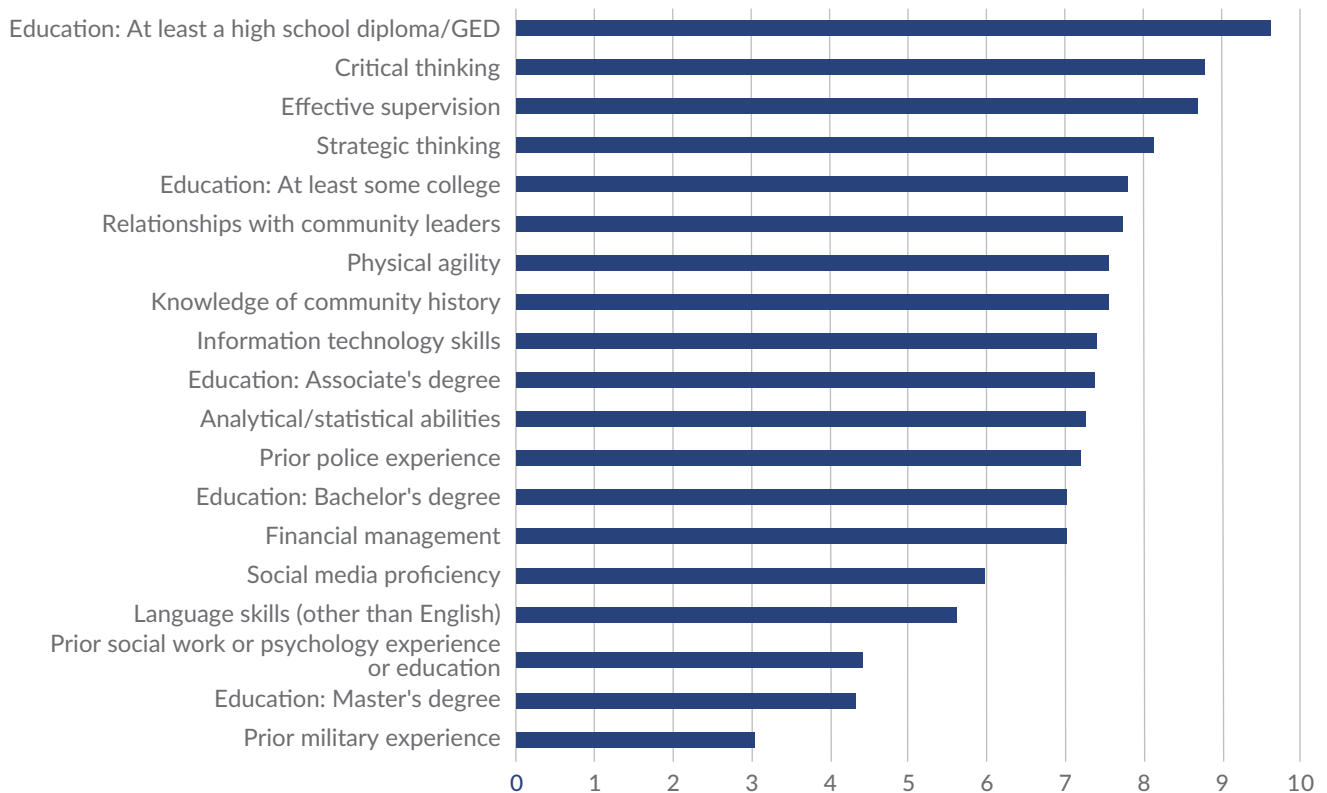
**TABLE 5** Population Density and Relative Priorities

Population density (population per square mile)	Reducing crime	Responding to accidents
Over 4,000	9.23	7.85
2,000-4,000	9.02	7.53
1,000-2,000	9.04	8.04
Under 1,000	8.56	8.63

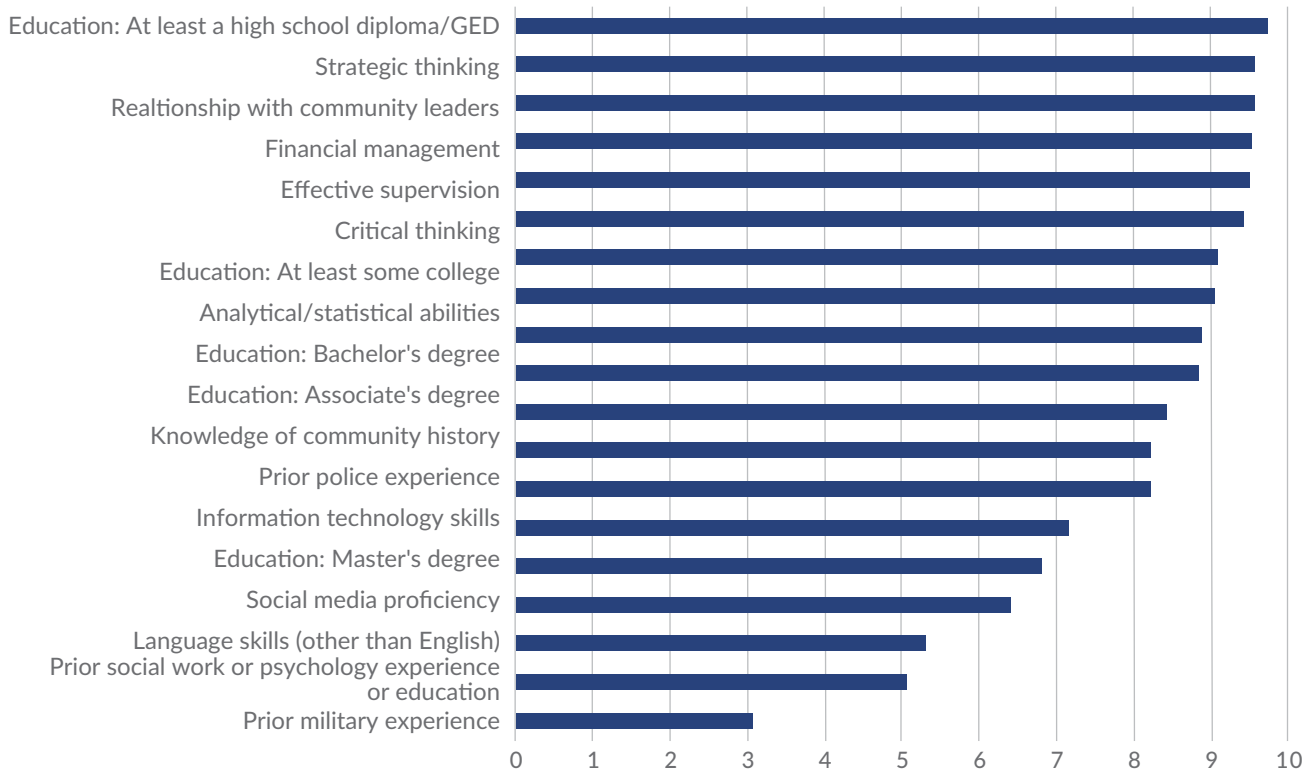
**FIGURE 3a Preferred Skills and Characteristics: Police Officers**



**FIGURE 3b Preferred Skills and Characteristics: Police Middle Management**



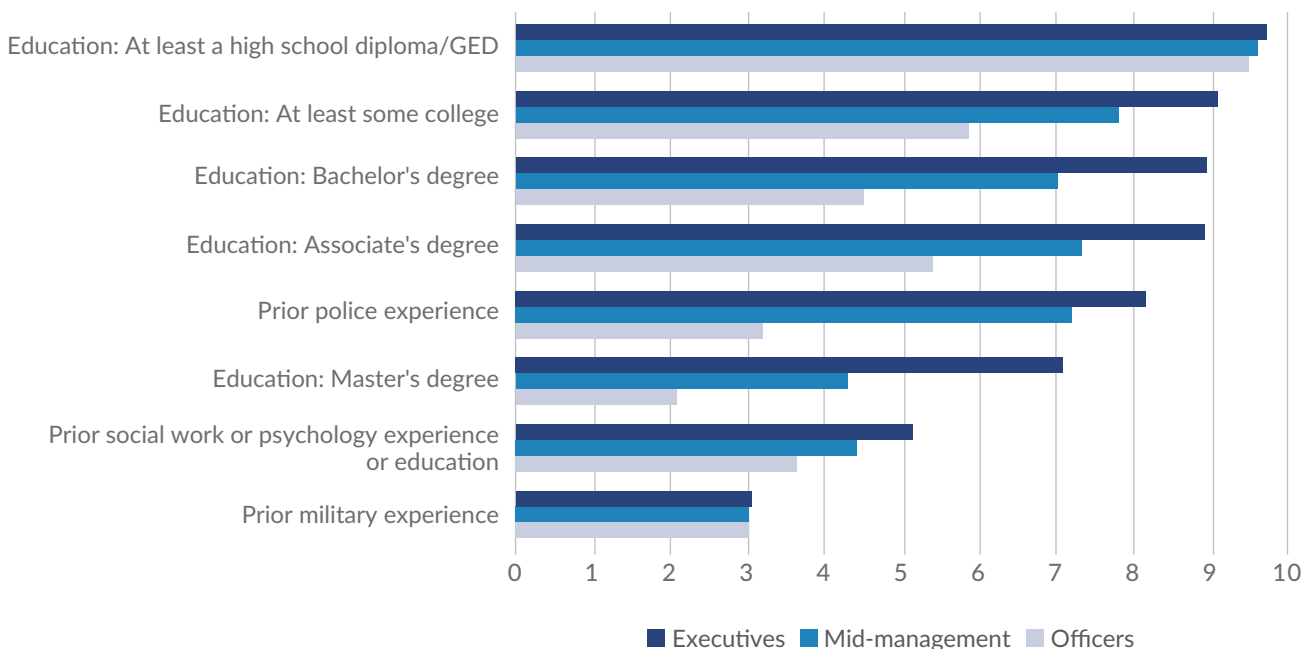
**FIGURE 3c Preferred Skills and Characteristics: Police Executive Management**



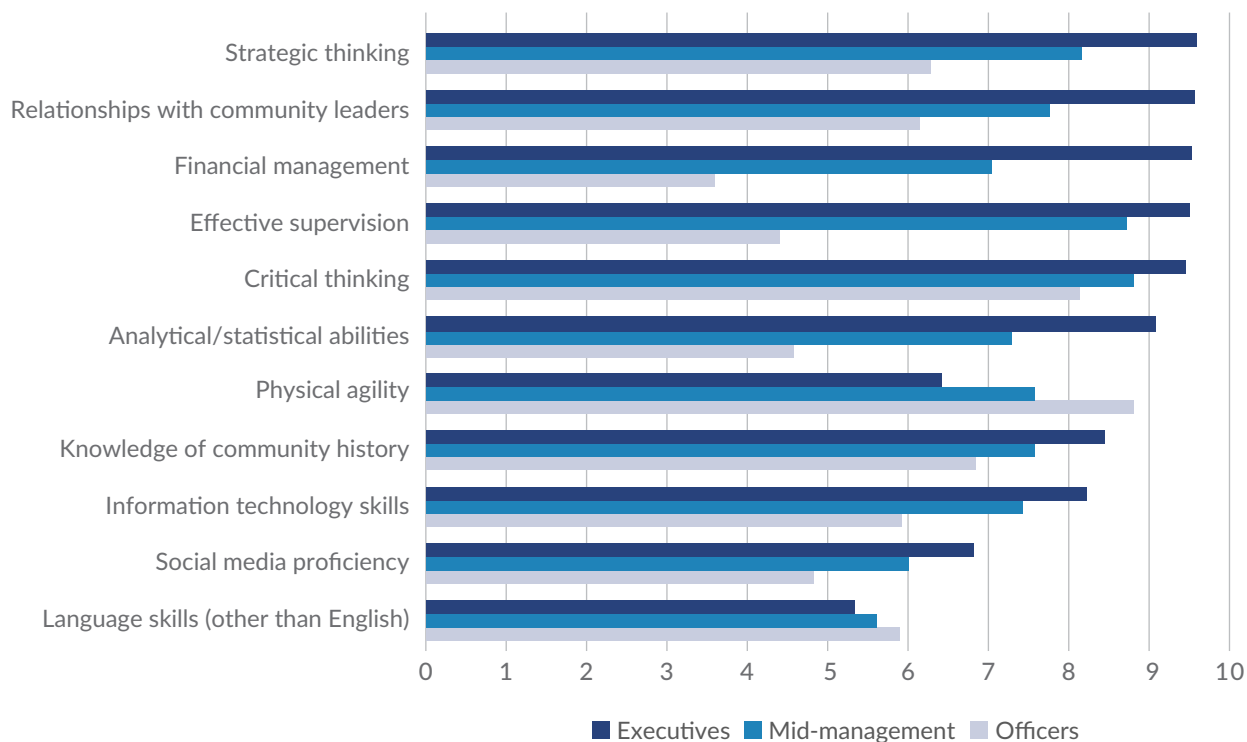
The graphs above (Figures 3a-3c) provide a snapshot of the skills sought for each type of position within the department. The graphs below (Figures 4a-4b) present an alternative visualization, showing all three position types side-by-side.

Within individual categories and positions, there is some divergence of opinion. For instance, the average rating of preference for an associate's degree for a police officer was 5.47. This was rated similarly by managers/CAOs (5.96) and HR staff (5.2), but it was

**FIGURE 4a Preferred Education and Experience, by Position**



**FIGURE 4b** Preferred Personal and Technical Skills, by Position



only rated a 3.91 by police staff. Regarding education and experience for executives, the average rating of preference for psychology experience or education was 5.08. By comparison, managers rated it similarly (4.67), while community members rated this higher (6.43) and police chiefs rated it lower (2.50).

Looking at demographics, while the importance of a police chief having language skills beyond English was rated an average of 5.32, in communities where 30 percent or more of the population is Hispanic, it received an average rating of 6.37. As shown on the graph of personal and technical skills, language skills

were deemed more important for officers (5.87) than for police administration.

It may not be surprising to see that financial management is rated significantly higher for police chiefs than for officers, but a similar relationship of increasing importance can be seen in social media proficiency and information technology skills. This may depend on whether an individual jurisdiction’s social media involvement is housed at the top of the organization (e.g., a chief’s blog or twitter feed) or decentralized among the officers who may be participating in neighborhood social media discussions.

Looking at the overall state and local workforce, information technology represents the second highest-rated skillset sought among employing agencies – not just for IT positions, but throughout their organizations.<sup>2</sup> While the perception in the model police officer survey seems to be that these skills are more important for executives within the department, they may be just as key for those line officers who are interacting with a wider array of technological tools and databases on a routine basis.

**A preference for bilingual skills among police officers received a rating of 5.87 – higher than the rating for completion of a degree program**

<sup>2</sup> *State and Local Government Workforce: 2018 Data and 10 Year Trends*, Center for State and Local Government Excellence, 2018. Among skills sought in new hires, information technology skills were cited by 55 percent of employers, surpassed only by interpersonal skills, which were cited by 70 percent.

In none of these cases was there a significant difference in ratings based on the population size of the jurisdictions reporting.

### Quality of Recruits

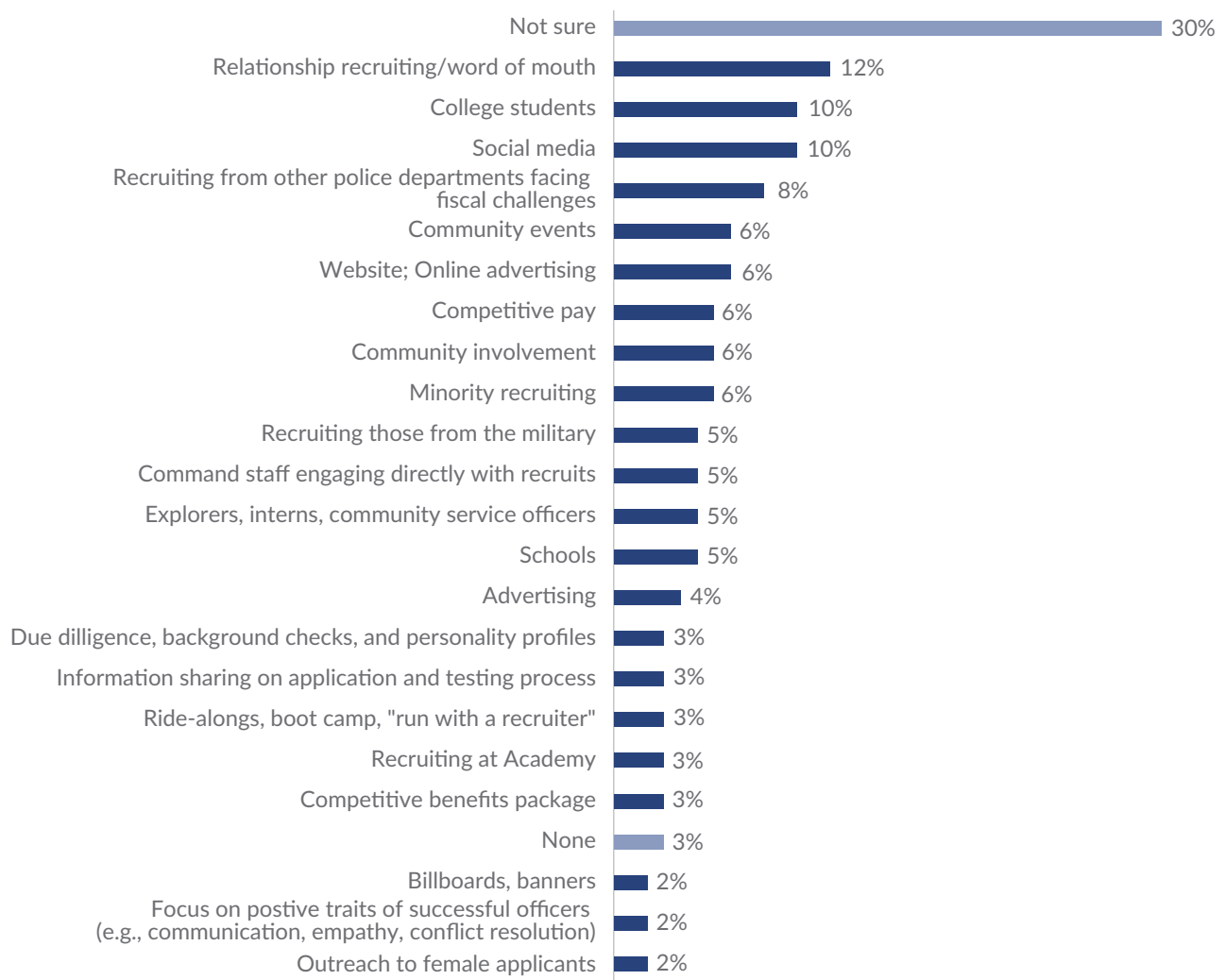
When asked about the quality of the police officer recruits, respondents were asked to assess this on a scale of Consistently High (4) to Improving (3) Declining (2) or Consistently Low (1). Most responses were clustered around an average of 2.86. While the variation was very slight, it is interesting to note that the most positive rating of the quality of new police recruits came from managers (3.09), and the most negative rating came from police staff (2.60).

### Recruiting Strategies

All respondents were asked to identify what they felt were the most effective recruiting strategies. Understandably, a high percentage of community respondents who do not deal with the procedural side of recruiting indicated that they were not sure or left the question blank (66 percent). That group aside, the remainder of the community respondents indicated the importance of community involvement (7 percent), outreach in the schools (6 percent), or college and minority community recruiting (5 percent each).

Looking exclusively at the respondents within each organization (police, HR, manager/CAO, or other staff), 30 percent expressed no opinion; 3 percent said there

**FIGURE 5** Most Effective Recruiting Strategies (responses from Staff Only)



Percentages in this figure are based on responses by jurisdiction staff only. This was an open-response question, with many people indicating more than one strategy. As a result, the percentages shown sum to more than 100 percent of respondents.



Courtesy of Sheriff's Office, Fairfax County, Virginia

were no effective recruitment strategies; and 12 percent identified relationship recruiting (based on prior encounters with the candidates within the community) and word of mouth as the most effective method. (See Figure 5.) Given this, community policing could reap benefits for a department not just in better police-community relations, but also in building the relationships that could help identify potential future officers or make a career in police work more attractive to them.

Social media and online recruiting were also highly rated, at 10 and 6 percent, respectively. This is not an unexpected finding, given that public safety recruits represent a younger demographic than the workforce as a whole.

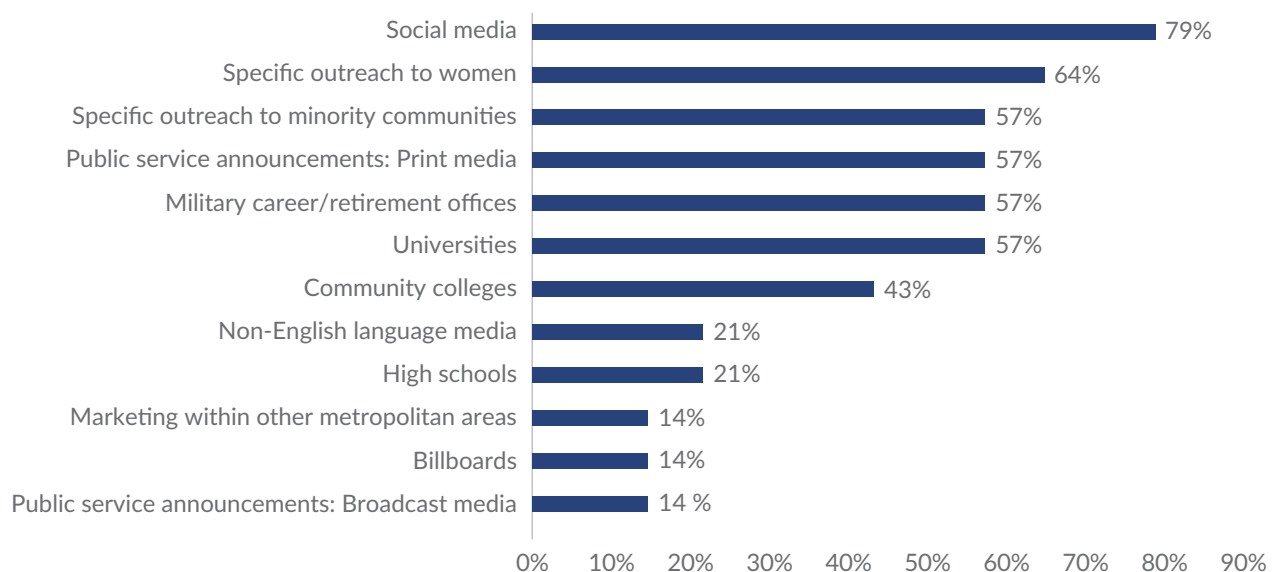
A number of additional strategies were suggested by 1 percent or fewer of the respondents. These have

been omitted from the graph, but may be worth considering as jurisdictions seek novel approaches to the challenge of recruiting (e.g., outreach to historically black colleges and universities or minority churches, considering the differing workforce interests of millennials, offering scholarships or academy sponsorships, offering incentive pay for further education or training, producing online recruitment videos, or focusing on retention by not painting too unrealistic a picture of the profession during the recruitment process).

Perhaps the most sensitive strategy cited is recruiting officers from communities experiencing fiscal stress (8 percent). This may be an indication that the jurisdictions themselves have pursued this strategy or that they perceive that others have done so – recruiting away those they'd already gone to great lengths to recruit and train. One could argue that even absent any active attempts to “poach” these officers, a certain passive appeal would remain for some officers to work their way up the ladder to their perceived ideal department, whether that's a higher-profile metropolitan agency, one with their preferred quality of life, or one offering higher pay. The practicality of such moves might depend in part on the structure of retirement systems, including vesting requirements and the portability of service credit to other departments within the state.

Another strategy that was cited by 5 percent of respondents was for command staff to be directly involved in the recruiting process. This may mean the chief, captains, or other high-level leadership meeting with participants in academy or explorer programs,

**FIGURE 6** Targeted Recruiting (responses from Human Resources)





attending job fairs or other outreach efforts, or meeting one-on-one with new officers during orientation.

### Targeted Recruiting

Focusing just on human resources staff, the survey also asked directly about targeted recruitment efforts – including what audiences were targeted and what images and themes were used in the campaign(s).

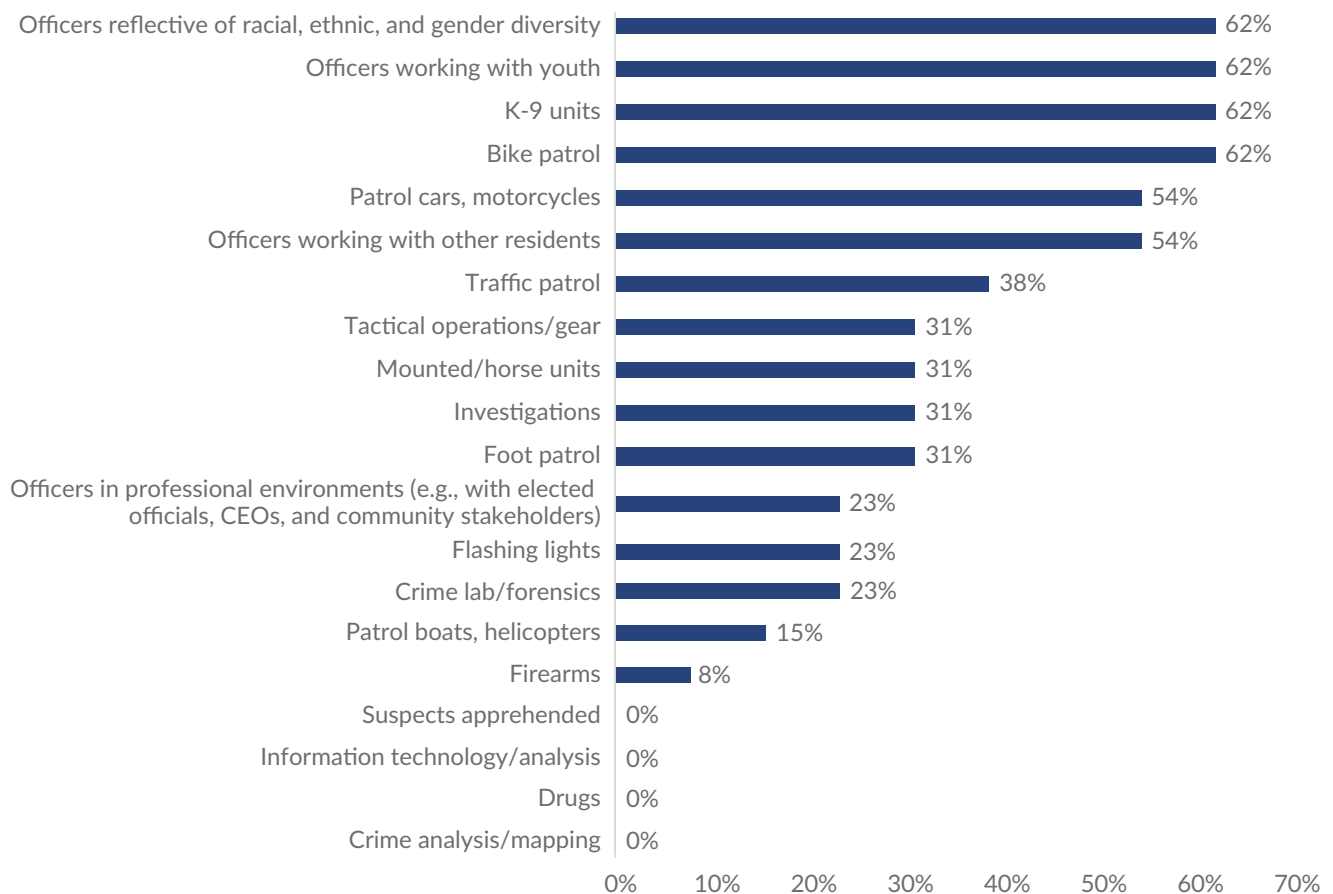
The top responses include social media and outreach to women, minorities, the military, and universities. As with the question asked of all respondents, there were also sizeable shares indicating the use of non-English

language media (21 percent) or marketing within other metropolitan areas (14 percent).

Here, 64 percent of human resource respondents indicated that they are doing targeted outreach to female recruits. By comparison, in Figure 5, among local government staff as a whole, such outreach was only cited by 2 percent as being the most successful strategy. For human resources staff responding to this same question, outreach to female recruits was cited by 6 percent as the most effective strategy. Two caveats help to put this into perspective. First, when asked about the most effective strategy, a full 30 percent were not sure. Second, when presented with an open-response question to cite the most effective strategies, many will cite one or two approaches that leap to mind and may leave out others that have been moderately effective. The determination of the effectiveness of each strategy on its own would require a more in-depth survey or a post-recruitment follow-up by each jurisdic-



**FIGURE 7** Recruitment Messaging: Photo and Video Images (responses from Human Resources)



3 Data is also available for the percentage hired by racial and ethnic background, but those figures would most appropriately be assessed individually and compared to the demographics of the community, metro area, or state within which each jurisdiction is located.

tion to ask their successful applicants what outreach methods were most appealing to them.

Regardless of the outreach efforts being made to bring more women onto the force, most respondents indicated that the share of female recruits hired over the past three years was between 9 and 22 percent, so one could argue there is still plenty of room to improve upon that level of performance.<sup>3</sup>

The images presented in recruitment campaigns appear to align with the priorities identified and targeted recruitment being conducted. With building community trust, solving problems, and fighting crime identified as priorities, and minority and student outreach among the recruitment strategies, one can see here that the top images used in recruitment campaigns include working with students and community members; patrolling by car, foot, or bike; and officers who reflect a diverse array of backgrounds. Crime-related and tactical images were cited by 0 to 31 percent of respondents. These figures do not indicate how prevalent such images are within the campaigns, but



rather the share of human resources respondents who report using them. For example, 62 percent of photos are not of dogs, but K-9 units appear somewhere within 62 percent of recruitment campaigns.

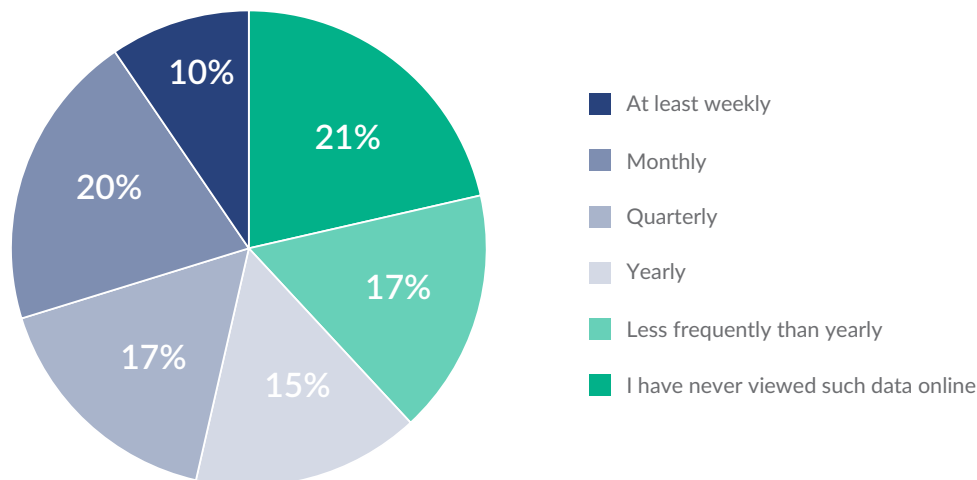
### Police/Community Relations

If a department is going to be building a relationship of trust with the community that will lead to a pipeline of future officers, then trust and accountability are a part of that relationship as well.

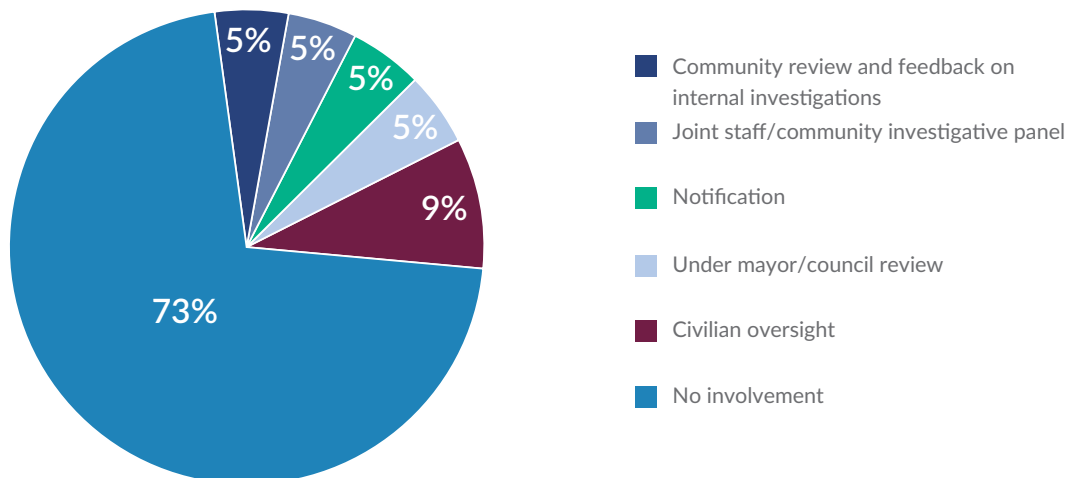
Considering the current focus on open data, the survey asked the extent to which respondents felt that policing data was open to and viewable by the public. On a scale of 1 (not open) to 10 (very open), the average response was a 6.59. Those who rated this transparency highest were police chiefs (7.46), with community members rating it a 6.04. Going hand in hand with perceptions of transparency is the question of how often people access the data that is posted. Here, the overall average was quarterly, with police chiefs split between reviewing data monthly or more often. Of the community respondents, 21 percent indicated that they have never viewed such data online. This may be an indication that the data is not posted, that there is insufficient effort made to publicize or facilitate its use, or that the community members do not take the time to access it. More positively, a total of 62 percent report viewing such data at least once per year, with many of those accessing it more frequently.

Accessibility aside, the survey asked the extent to which respondents feel that investigations of alleged

**FIGURE 8** Frequency of Viewing Policing Data Online (responses from Community Members)



**FIGURE 9** Community Involvement in Internal Investigations (responses from Police Chiefs)

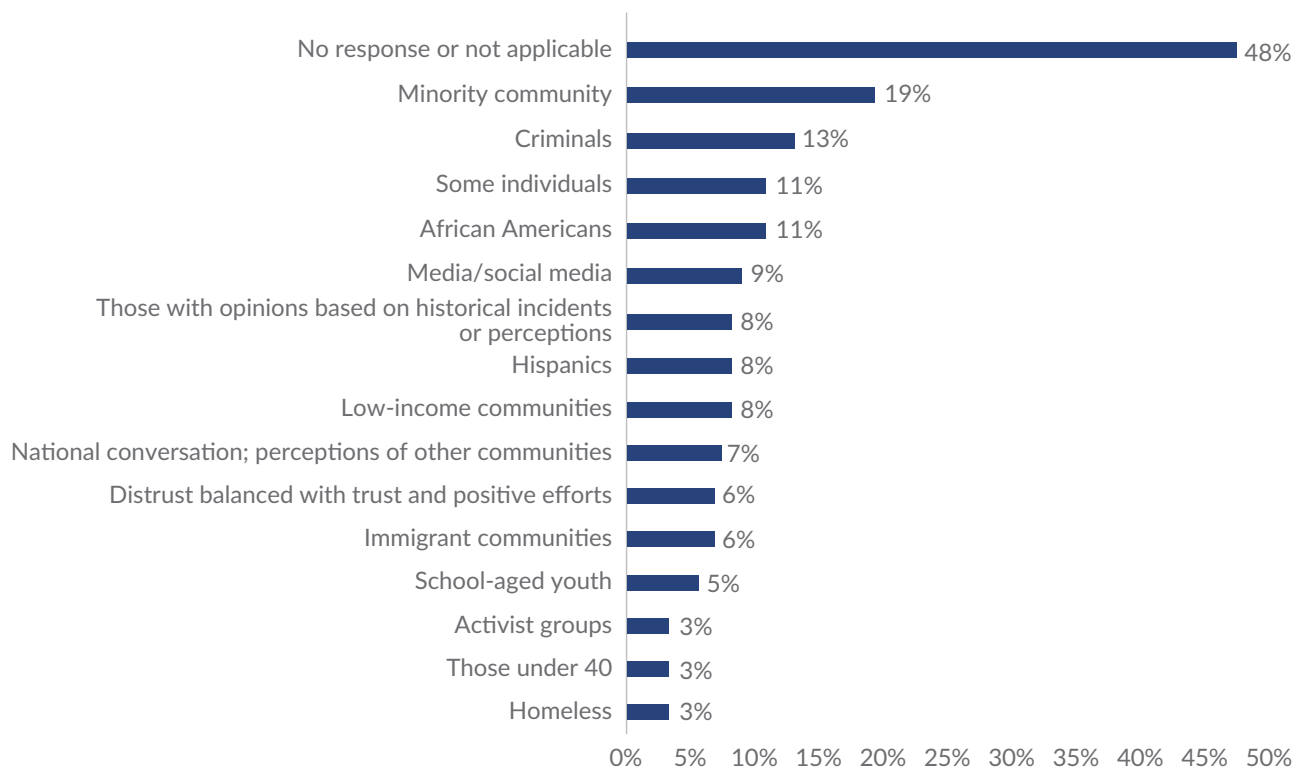


police officer misconduct are handled fairly, on a scale of 1 (not handled fairly) to 10 (handled very fairly) or concluded in a timely manner, on a scale of 1 (not concluded in a timely manner) to 10 (very timely). The overall averages for both questions were toward the more positive end of the spectrum (7.75 for fairness

and 7.19 for timeliness). The highest ratings came from police chiefs (9.13 for fairness) and managers/CAOs (8.40 for timeliness). Community ratings averaged 6.82 for fairness and 6.79 for timeliness.

The lowest ratings came from jurisdictions where the population was at least 30 percent African American

**FIGURE 10** What Groups in the Community, if Any, Distrust the Police and Why?



This was an open-response question, with many people indicating more than one group. As a result, the percentages shown sum to more than 100 percent of respondents. Responses greater than 1 percent are shown above.

(6.50 for fairness and 5.95 for timeliness; representing all staff and community respondents). Solely among community members in these jurisdictions, the average ratings were 5.78 for fairness and 5.56 for timeliness.

Considering how such investigations are conducted, 73 percent of police chiefs indicated that there was no process to include the community in the investigation. Another 9 percent have civilian oversight, while 20 percent incorporate some other form of notice, joint investigation, or feedback.

One final trust indicator was an open-ended question asked of all respondents about what groups in the community might distrust the police department and why.

The largest category by far is the combination of those who either did not respond, entered “not sure” or “not applicable,” – a total of 48 percent. Regionally, the area most likely to have registered one of these three responses was the Northeast, where a total of 56 percent did not indicate any particular group mistrusting the police.

Those who may distrust the police include several related categories: the minority community (19 percent), African Americans (11 percent), Hispanics (8 percent), and immigrant communities (6 percent). Other respondents provided a more qualified answer, such as “some individuals” (11 percent) or that there was distrust balanced with trust, amid positive efforts by the department (6 percent).

Communities where the highest levels of distrust were reported were those with 10-20 percent African American population (44 percent indicated that minority communities distrusted police), 20-30 percent African American population (30 percent indicated that African Americans distrusted police) and 30 percent or more Hispanics (15 percent indicated that Hispanics distrusted police).

The age of the local population also correlated to perceptions of minority community distrust – cited by 15 percent of those in communities where more than 25 percent of the population was under 18 years old and 16 percent of those in communities where less than 25 percent of the population was 55 or older.

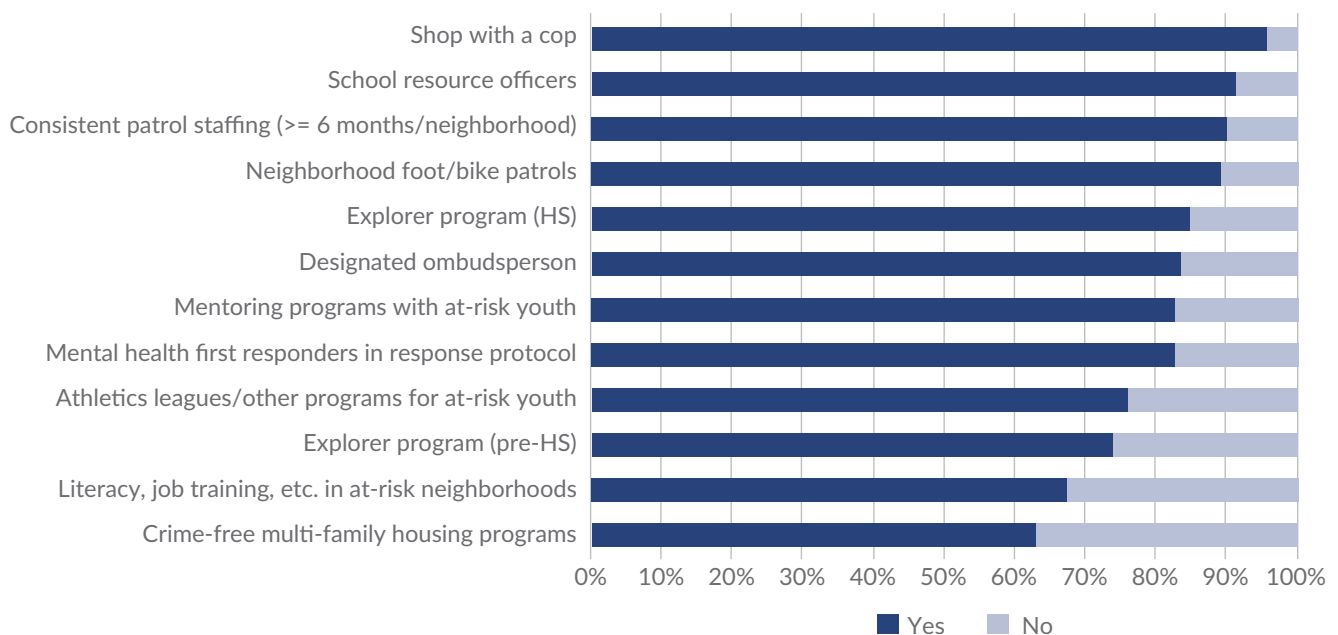
### Community Engagement

Police chiefs were asked about what community policing programs are operated within the jurisdiction.

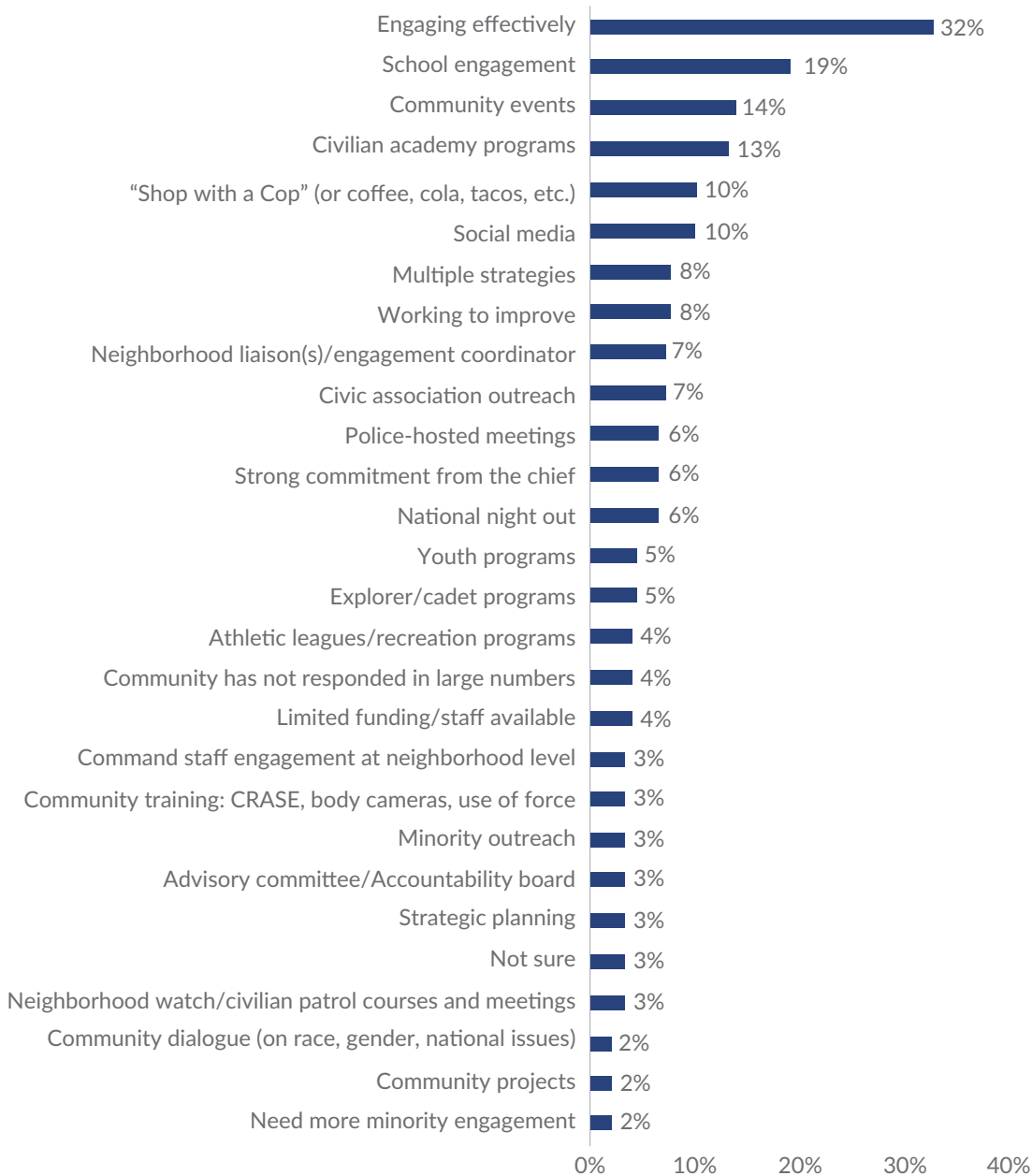
The most common of these (Shop with a cop, 91 percent) was also cited in questions that were asked of all respondents (see Figure 12 on page 15).

In this case, there was a very positive share (32 percent) indicating that the department is successfully engaging, and a very low share (1 percent) indicating that the department was not engaging successfully. Most of the other comments were specific to personal engagement programs (e.g., Coffee/Shop with a Cop (10 percent); explorer programs (5 percent); vacation

**FIGURE 11** Community Policing Programs Operated (responses from Police Chiefs)



**FIGURE 12** Comments About the Police Department's Community Engagement Efforts



This was an open-response question, with many people indicating more than one group. As a result, the percentages shown sum to more than 100% percent of respondents. Responses greater than 1 percent are shown above.

watch programs (1 percent) or group engagement efforts (e.g., school programs, 19 percent; community events, 14 percent; civic association outreach, 7 percent). A few discussed limitations to that engagement strategy (e.g., community has not responded in large numbers, 4 percent; limited staff/budget, 4 percent) or abdication of that role (engagement is left to elected officials, 1 percent).

Breaking down those figures further, the highest percentage indicating that police were engaging

effectively were those in jurisdictions over 400,000 population (44 percent) and those where Hispanics represent 20-30 percent of the population (also 44 percent), those in the West Coast region (37 percent) or areas of higher population density (33 percent). It is difficult to draw wider conclusions from these results, however, as some may have focused their responses on the specific strategies the department is pursuing, rather than using their open-ended response to indicate broader satisfaction.

Looking at those strategies, engagement in the schools was most often cited in the Northeast (26 percent), while civilian academies were most often cited in the Southeast (20 percent). Both were most prevalent among those in jurisdictions with a population between 25,000 and 100,000 (25 percent for school engagement and 20 percent for civilian academies).

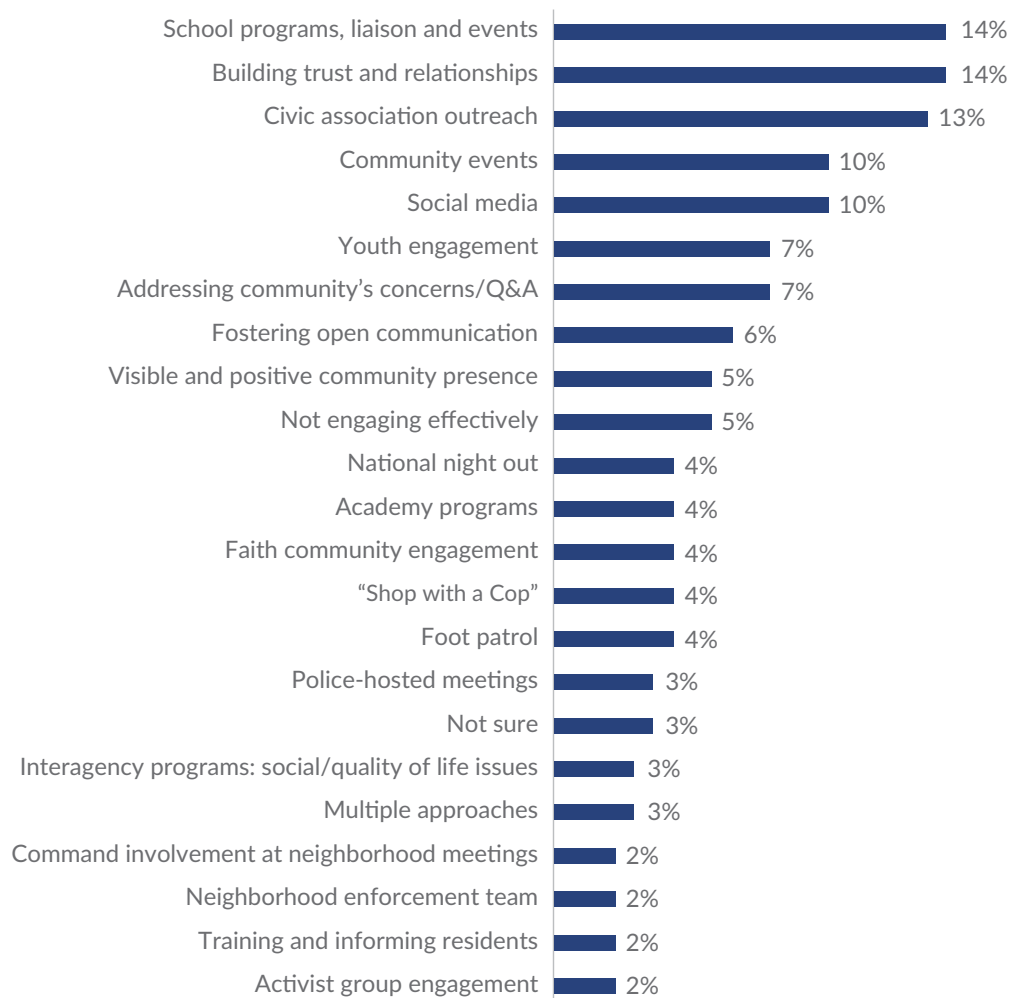
Community events were hosted or attended at an average rate of 3.3 events per year per 1,000 population. Of the types of groups actively engaged, almost all police chiefs cited nonprofit group leaders, other governmental agencies, the business community, and local media – all reported by 80 percent or more of respondents. The one segment that was rated lower was private security companies, engaged by just 43 percent of departments.



A related follow-up question asked about the ways the department’s community engagement efforts had been most successful.

This was an open-response question, with many people indicating more than one way. As a result, the percentages shown sum to more than 100 percent of

**FIGURE 13a** Ways Police Department’s Community Engagement Efforts Have Been Most Successful



This was an open-response question, with many people indicating more than one group. As a result, the percentages shown sum to more than 100% percent of respondents. Responses greater than 1 percent are shown above.

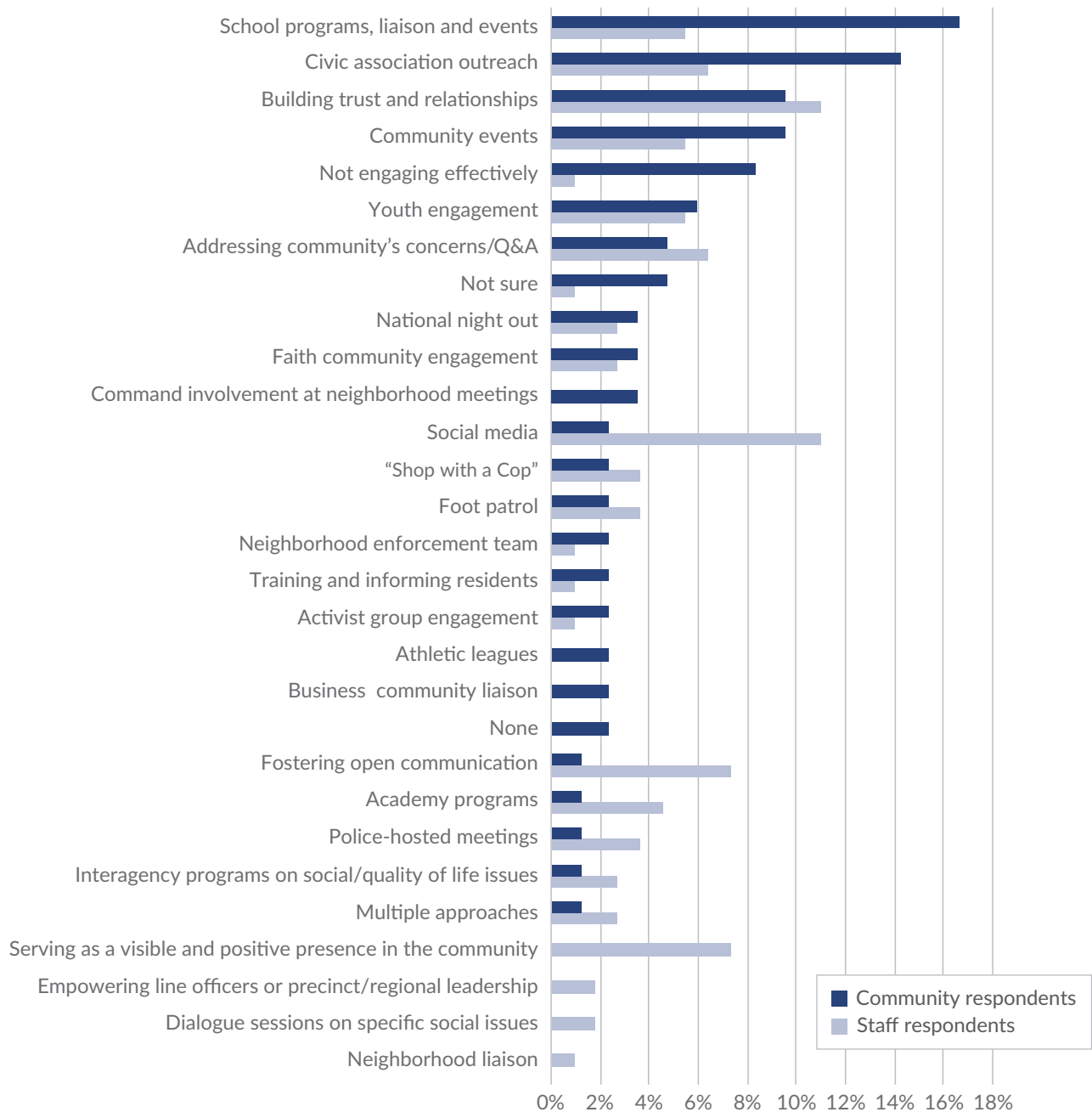


respondents. Responses greater than 1 percent are shown in Figure 13a.

Responses to this question included many of those highlighted previously, but also included a range of responses that dealt more with communication than concrete programs (e.g., building trust, 14 percent;

addressing community concerns, 7 percent; fostering open communication, 6 percent). There were also higher shares indicating that they did not feel the department’s engagement efforts were successful (5 percent) or that they were not sure (3 percent).

**FIGURE 13b** Ways Police Department’s Community Engagement Efforts Have Been Most Successful (breakout by Community and Staff)



This was an open-response question, with many people indicating more than one way. As a result, the percentages shown sum to more than 100 percent of respondents. Responses greater than 1 percent are shown above.

**TABLE 6** Community Engagement: Divergence of Opinion between Community and Staff

	Community respondents	Jurisdiction staff respondents
School engagement	16.7%	5.5%
Civic association outreach	14.3%	6.4%
Not engaging effectively	8.3%	0.9%
Social media	2.4%	11.0%
Fostering open communication	1.2%	7.3%
Serving as a visible and positive presence in the community	0.0%	7.3%

**Most effective engagement:  
School outreach and building trust**

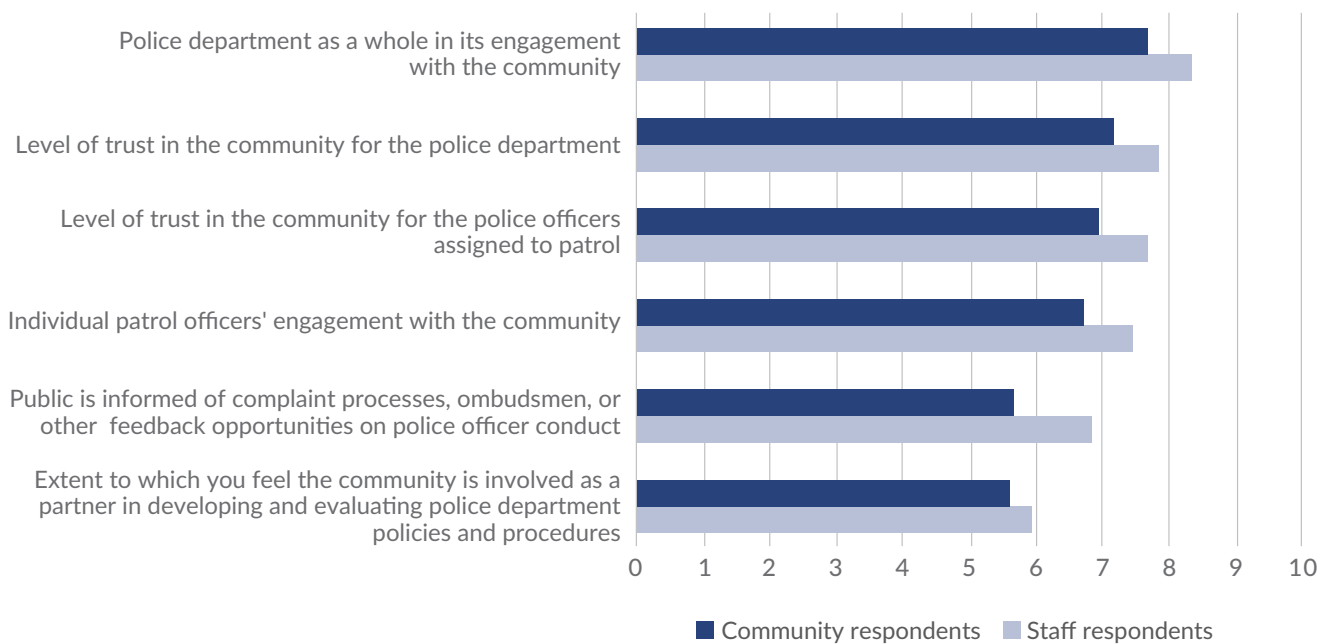
Comparing community respondents to staff, the top community item and among the top staff items is school engagement. While respondents were not being asked to weigh the importance of outreach against crime prevention or law enforcement, the perceived effectiveness of this type of engagement, along with the relationship building deemed important in building a recruitment pipeline, would seem to indicate the two-fold importance of this type of engagement.

There is a divergence of opinion as to what strategies are most effective. School and civic outreach programs are much more preferred by community respondents, while social media and civilian academy programs are rated more highly by jurisdiction staff, but both are still considered effective by both groups.

The fact that community groups would not have cited some programs may be because they are not aware that the programs exist. If that is the case, it may mean that more needs to be done to make local residents aware of those efforts.

Taking one example from the list, civilian academy programs were cited somewhat less often by community members (1.2 percent) than by jurisdiction staff (4.6 percent). The survey asked whether the respon-

**FIGURE 14** Engagement and Trust (breakout by Community and Staff)



dent participated (either as a presenter or an attendee) in any community academy training programs for residents to become more familiar with departmental or organizational policy, procedures, and governance. For this question, 54 percent of staff respondents said they had attended, while 38 percent of community respondents indicated that they had attended. The considerable participation by community members would seem to indicate that the sample participating in this survey is fairly well engaged with the police department and would be expected to have heard a detailed department orientation through the academy programs. While they may still rate the academy program itself as not among the most successful departmental strategies, the rating differentials on the other items may be a combination of lack of awareness (among the 62 percent who had not participated in academy programs) and dissatisfaction with the results being achieved.

Finally, there was one other series of questions (rated 1 to 10) where community members' attitudes were compared to those of jurisdiction staff with regard to engagement and trust (see Figure 14 on page 18).

The ranked order of responses was the same for both community members and staff, although each was rated slightly higher among staff. The widest disparity in these ratings is for the extent to which the public is informed about complaint processes and opportunities

for feedback (community members rated this a 5.69, while staff rated it a 6.86).

To measure satisfaction themselves, 57 percent of the participating communities conducted a statistically valid community survey in the past two years, and in those community surveys, an average of 84 percent of respondents indicated that they felt 'very safe' or 'safe' in their neighborhoods.

**57% conducted a community survey, with 84% of residents saying they felt safe or very safe**

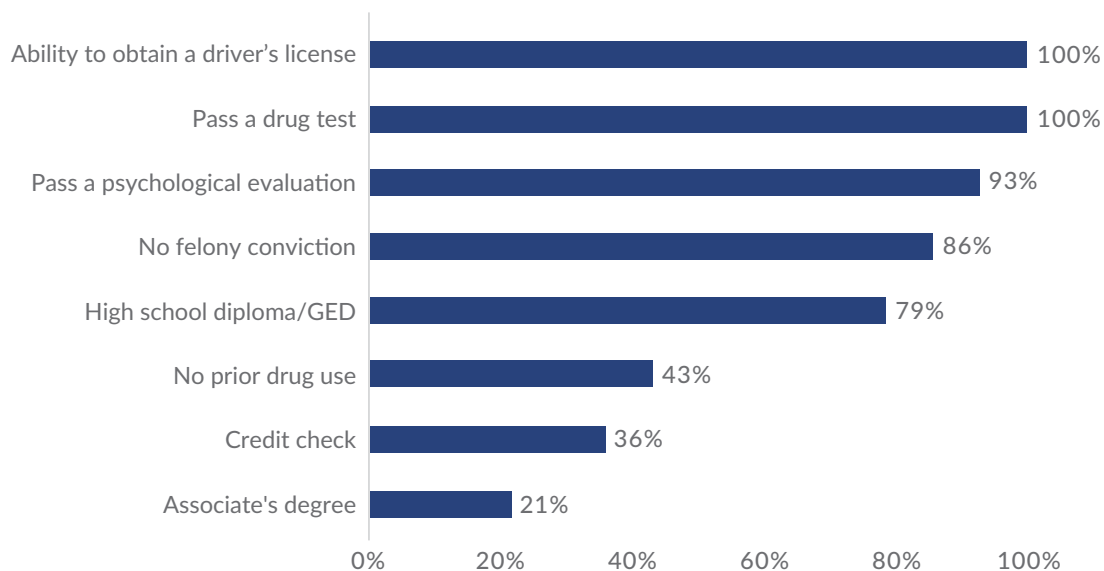
### Qualifications, Preferences, and Hiring

Position requirements include meeting certain education and testing standards. Most respondents indicated a minimum hiring age of 20.5 to 21, although some large and small jurisdictions accept recruits as young as 18.

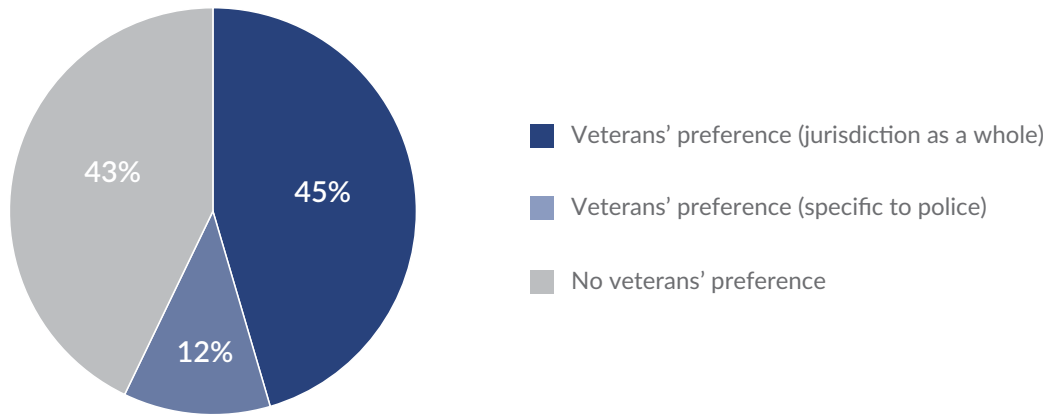
All responding jurisdictions required candidates to pass a drug test, but only 43 percent disqualified candidates that had any prior history of drug use.

Veterans are often perceived as being good candidates for a public safety career. While they are among

**FIGURE 15** Police Officer Minimum Requirements (responses from Human Resources)



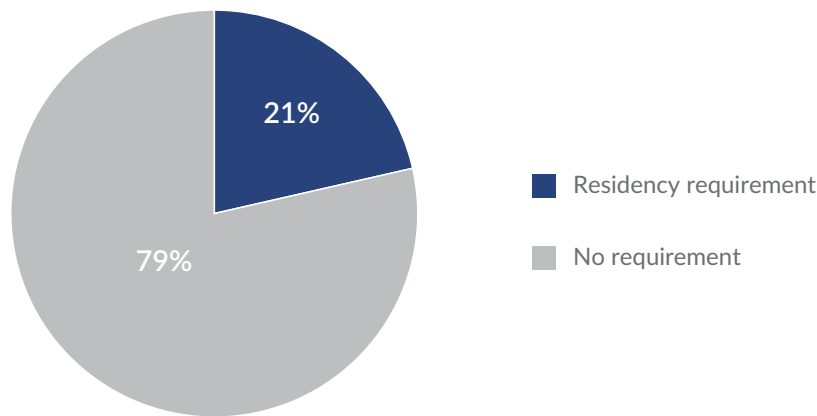
**FIGURE 16** Veterans' Preference



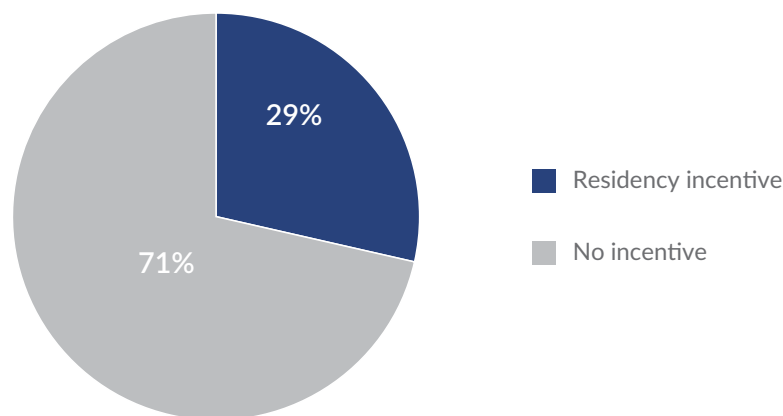
those recruited for the profession, a little more than half of jurisdictions reported a veterans' preference in hiring. In most cases, this was expressed as a preference in the hiring decision only and did not impact other job requirements, such as education, credit checks, psychological evaluations, or written exams.

Local residency is also viewed as preferable, either as part of an officer's background (as noted above in Skills and Characteristics) or as a means of further connecting with the jurisdiction as a whole or with the neighborhood being served. Some jurisdictions impose residency requirements for their officers or provide residency incentives.

**FIGURE 17a** Residency Requirements



**FIGURE 17b** Residency Incentives for Officers to Reside within the Territory They Patrol



On the question of residency incentives, the respondents were not asked to identify how narrow the geographic areas are within which the officers must reside in order to qualify (e.g., specific precincts, districts, or the jurisdiction as a whole).

Given those standards and preferences, as well as the targeted recruiting efforts, it is interesting to see the actual mix of recruits hired:

- The minimum education for 79 percent of agencies is a high school diploma, but 28 percent of recruits have a bachelor's degree or higher, with 73 percent having taken at least some criminal justice coursework or academy training.

- Veterans' preferences are offered by a total of 57 percent of the respondents, but only 9 percent of those hired have military experience.

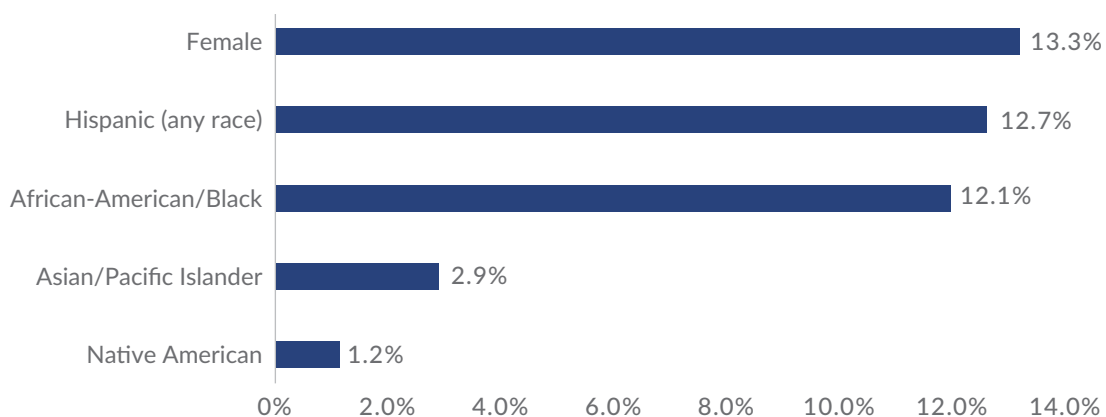
The overall percentage of veterans living in the communities surveyed was 6 percent. Curiously, the two jurisdictions in this sample that reported the highest percentage of veterans hired (20 and 30 percent) had a low percentage of veterans in the local population. Both provided a veterans' preference in hiring.

On average, both the hiring of African Americans and Hispanics trailed the share of those groups in the local population (by 1 percent and 5 percent, respectively). Although some individual jurisdictions

**FIGURE 18** Prior Experience and Education of Recruits (responses from Human Resources)



**FIGURE 19** Diversity of Officers Hired in the Last Three Years (responses from Human Resources)



far exceeded their local demographics and others trailed, a more in-depth review would be required to draw conclusions about the success of their various outreach efforts, particularly considering the varying numbers of vacancies they may be trying to fill in any given year.

### Onboarding and Training

Even where recruits come to a police department having already completed an academy program, it is necessary to acquaint them with the priorities and culture of the department and to provide supplemental training that reinforces those priorities. So beyond asking about the qualities possessed by the ideal applicant, the survey also asked about what happens after the officers are hired, both in the short-term and as they continue with the department.

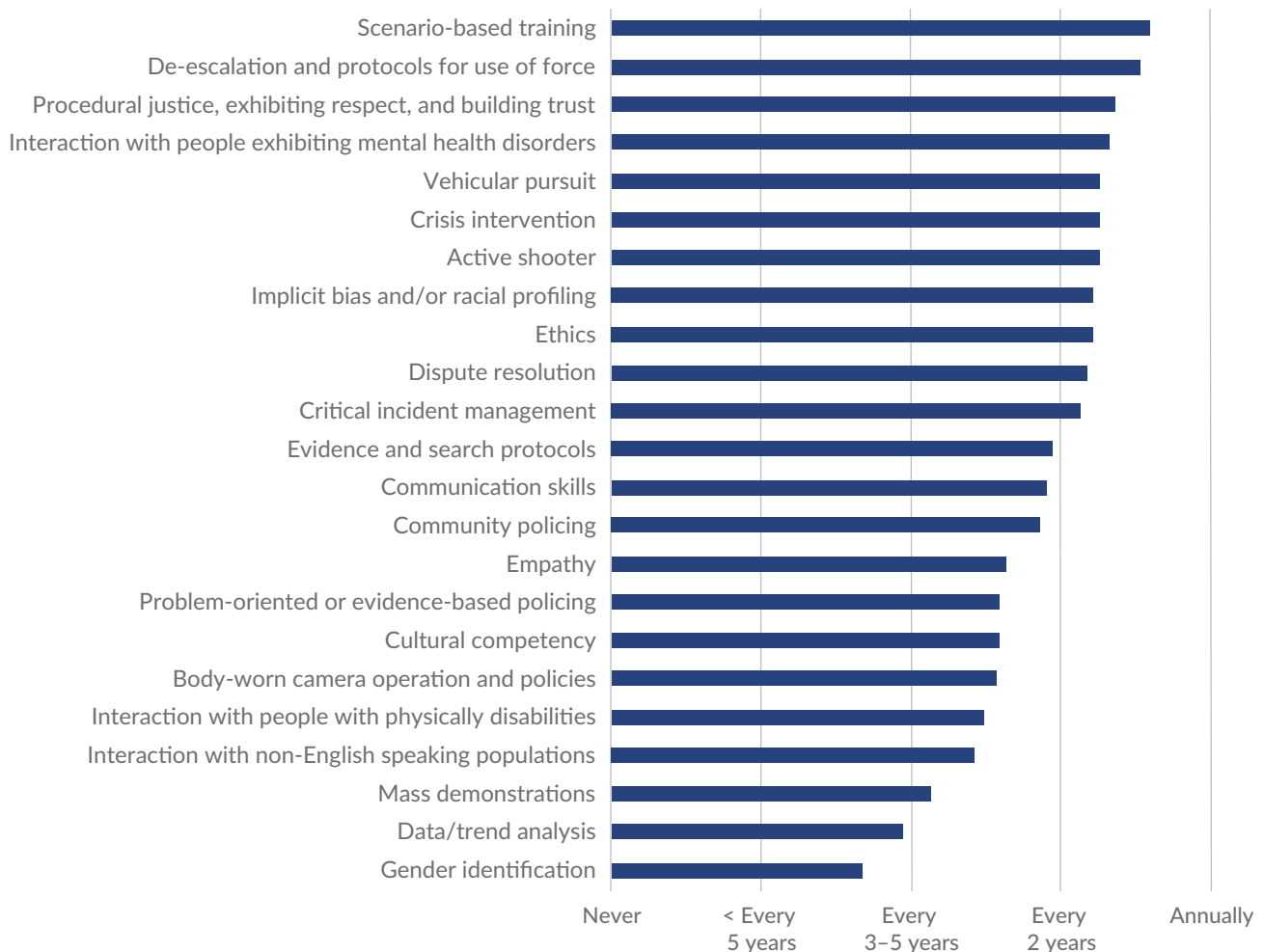


Courtesy of the San Antonio Police Department

Most of the training types surveyed were completed every 2 years or every 3-5 years. In each case, these responses represent training taking place after completion of a police academy program.

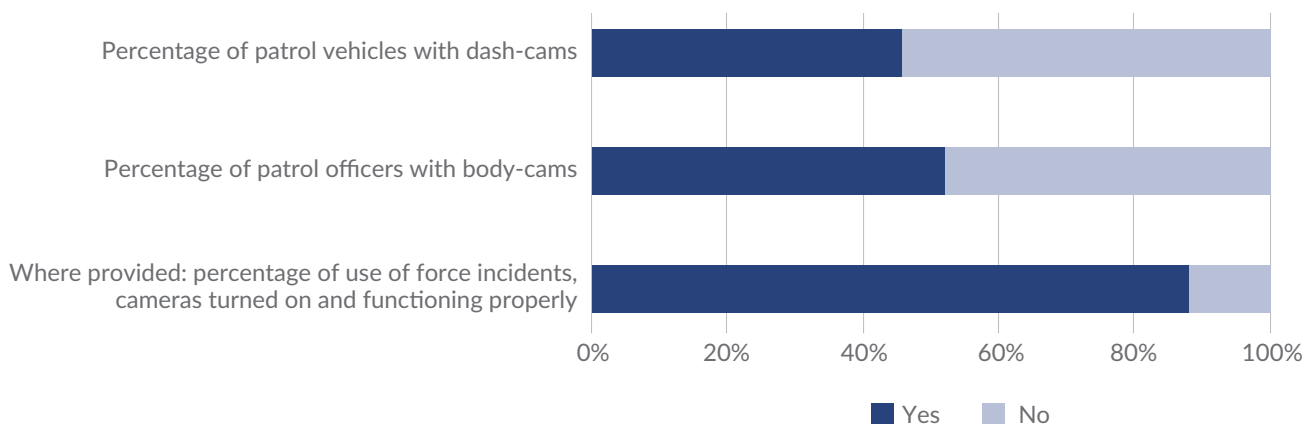
The officers' familiarity with the concepts and procedures directly impacts the success of the related programs or proper use of technology or equipment.

**FIGURE 20** Frequency of Training (responses from Police Chiefs)





**FIGURE 21** Dash-Cams and Body-Cams (responses from Police Chiefs)



The training frequency for body-worn camera operation also falls in the middle of the 2-year to 3-5-year time periods. More specifically, the survey asked about how many departments had deployed dash-cams or body-cams, and if provided, how often they were turned on and functioning properly during a use-of-force incident. (See Figure 21.)

Among administrative matters, 95 percent of chiefs noted that they have a policy on racial profiling and 71 percent have one on de-escalation.

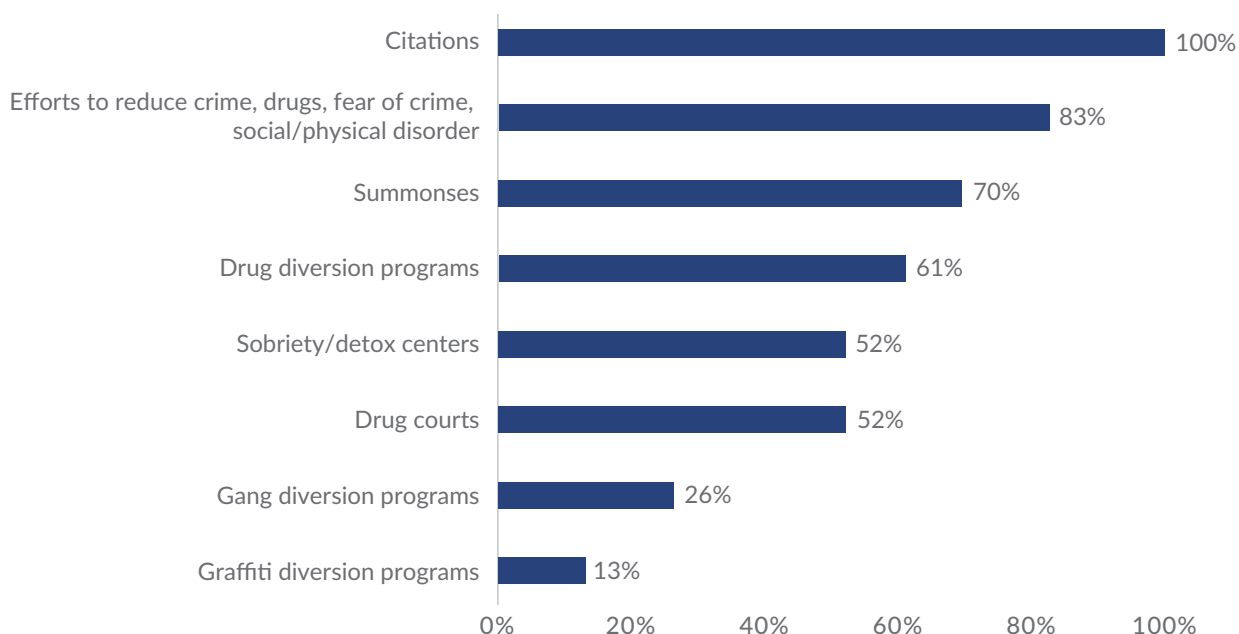
**Assignments**

While priority will obviously be assigned to emergency calls, some departments do not have a high volume of

such calls, and therefore may assign more of their staff to other duties. Among the respondents, the average time sworn staff were assigned to traffic enforcement was 30 percent, and of all sworn and civilian staff, the time assigned to community policing, bike/foot patrols, and schools was 25 percent. Budgetarily, 23 percent of department funds were set aside for crime prevention activities.

Decisions on priorities within these communities are made at the local level, and it is beyond the scope of this report to determine the appropriate level of such activity within any given territory or the priorities assigned to emergency calls, non-emergency calls, community policing, traffic, investigations, crime

**FIGURE 22** What Tools Do Officers Have Access to Beyond Arrest and Enforcement? (responses from Police Chiefs)



prevention, interagency task forces, or other activities. However, where funds, training, hours or policies are built around certain priorities, there is a greater likelihood that officers will be properly equipped to deal with related issues as they arise.

### Scope of Activity

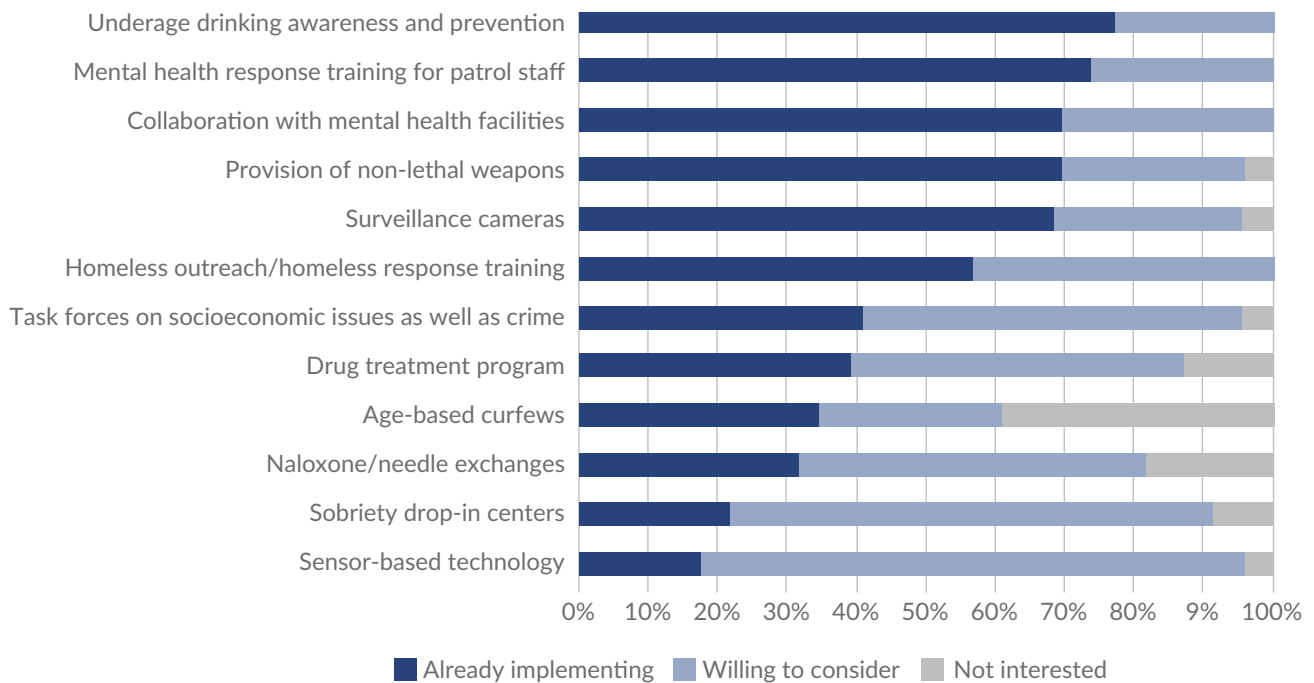
Within Figure 22, efforts to reduce crime, drugs, fear of crime, and social/physical disorder refer to those short- and long-term efforts that might be initiated at the

discretion of a community-assigned officer.

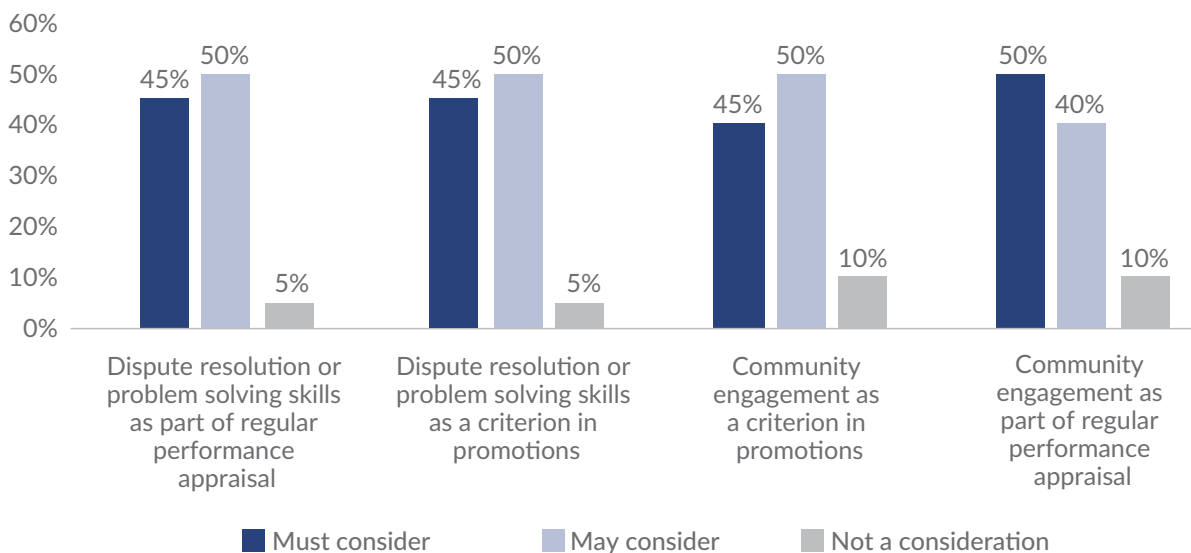
Of those responding, 59 percent indicated they earmark some portion of revenues for alternatives to enforcement, while 90 percent indicated an interest in pursuing related grants.

A similar question was asked of managers/CAOs, looking at the jurisdiction's interest in various alternatives to enforcement – a factor that would relate to priority setting and training within the departments. (See Figure 23 below.)

**FIGURE 23** Jurisdiction Interest in Alternatives to Enforcement (responses from Managers/CAOs)



**FIGURE 24** Criteria for Performance Reviews and Promotions



Sensor-based technologies include ShotSpotter and other applications, such as those that link streetlight intensity to motion sensors or alarm activations.

## Evaluations

Recruitment, training, and policy-setting help set the guidelines for new recruits, but to reinforce the importance of various priorities, departments may also consider those as part of their officers' regular performance reviews. For dispute resolution, problem-solving skills, and community engagement, 90 percent or more of the jurisdictions may or must consider such factors in an officer's performance appraisal or evaluation for promotion. Similar criteria might be set for other local priorities.

## Complaints

Another method of gauging the background, experience, and training of officers is to look at the complaints filed against them and their disposition. Among the jurisdictions participating, there was an average of 3.81 complaints filed per 10,000 population, with an average of 0.35 of those complaints involving improper use of force.

Most of those jurisdictions reported use-of-force complaints sustained in 0-5 percent of cases; the only two that reported a higher percentage were jurisdictions that had only received two complaints each during the past fiscal year. Considering all complaint types, 13 percent were sustained.

As with the percentage of time spent on various priorities, it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the appropriate disposition of those claims or whether they could have been impacted by the recruitment or training process. The data shown are provided for sample comparison purposes only.

## CONCLUSION

There is no magic solution that will solve all jurisdictions' police recruiting challenges. But with consideration of the strategies outlined above, an appropriate onboarding and training plan, and effective partnership with community stakeholders, jurisdictions can build upon their existing efforts in a way that leads to more effective hiring and retention.

In addition, given the significant divergence of opinion among staff and community members on the various questions addressed above, jurisdiction and police department management would do well to investigate

the sources of such disconnects and build the effective dialogues that will, in turn, help the officers be more successful in the neighborhoods they are serving.

## Key Takeaways

Among the key findings of the survey, the highest-rated priority was building community trust. In fact, all subgroups of respondents (police chiefs, officers, managers, human resources staff, and community members) rated this a 9.3 or higher – above the average rating of any other priority. As much as the stereotypical image associated with policing focuses on law enforcement, the community trust aspect is one that is at the top of these key stakeholders' priorities and should be acknowledged as such in the structuring of recruitment and training efforts.

Diversity of recruiting methods is also notable – not just in the recruiting of a diverse workforce, but also in reaching people via whatever methods are most effective. Print, broadcast, online, and billboard advertising are all well represented among the key strategies, as are more targeted approaches like specific outreach to women, minorities, veterans, and students, or such high-touch approaches as executive leadership's engagement with recruits.

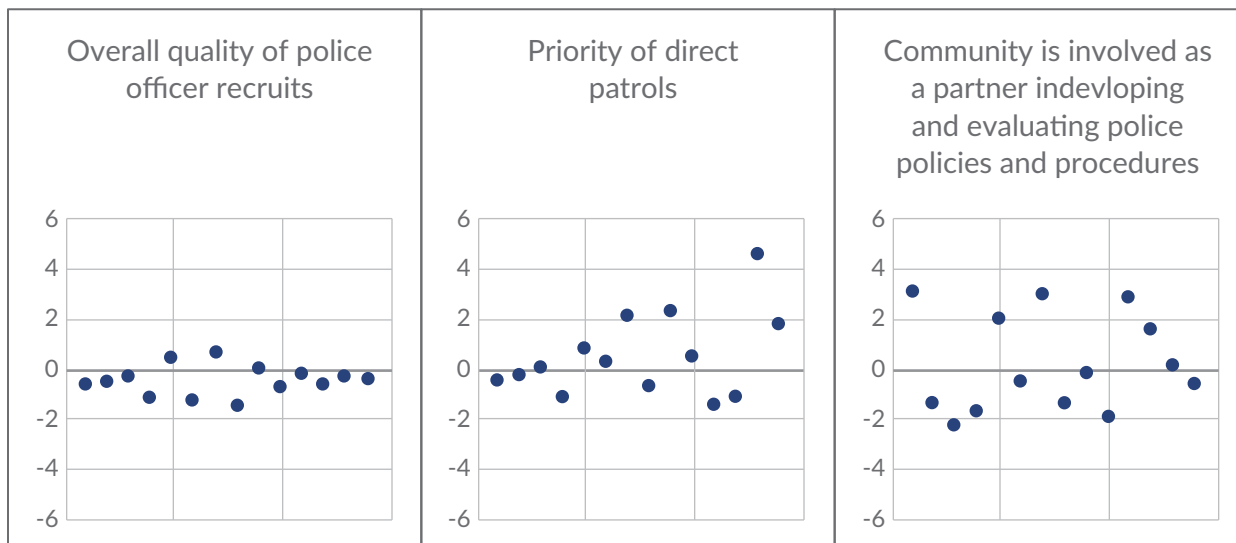
There are also a wide variety of community engagement strategies in place – some nearly universal, like shop with a cop and school resource officers, and some more unique. In this sample, 90 percent of police chiefs reported maintaining regular neighborhood assignments for their officers for at least six months. As with the priority on building community trust, such assignments and outreach initiatives set the environment within which the recruits operate, as does the training regimen, with most reporting that de-escalation, mental health, crisis intervention, racial profiling, and other key topics are covered at least every two years.

## Implications for Policy and Practice

One central issue to be addressed is how responses to key questions may vary depending on who is being asked. These can be illuminating both in the broader dataset (e.g., who might distrust the police or which skills are perceived as important by different groups), and within an individual jurisdiction.

Throughout this report, there are references to divergent responses by different subgroups of respondents. In individual jurisdictions, it is also possible to see situations where the manager, police chief, or members of the community may agree or disagree.

**FIGURE 25** Differential Ratings of Priorities between Community and Staff Respondents



Looking just at those jurisdictions from which at least eight people responded to the survey, including at least three community members, it is possible to look at the spread of responses within the jurisdiction, with a positive spread indicating that staff rated that item higher, and a negative number indicating that the community rated that item higher. Among the 14 jurisdictions that meet these criteria:

- On traditional policing priorities, it is common for there to be some agreement between staff and the community. For example, both staff and community members tend to agree that police chiefs should build relationships with community leaders (maximum spread -1.2; standard deviation 0.63). This may be a positive starting point for dialogue, as it recognizes shared organizational and community goals.
- Interestingly, even on broader questions of the quality of police officer recruits, the variation within jurisdictions is fairly low (maximum spread -1.5; standard deviation 0.59). This does not mean that all agree that recruits are of high quality, but rather that in each of these jurisdictions, the staff and community members have a very similar opinion, whatever that may be. Where the perception among both staff and the community is that current recruits are of lower quality, that may not make for a positive headline, but it can facilitate shared exploration of possible solutions, whether those are in the form of improved recruiting methods, training, or community engagement, or support for more competitive compensation.
- The spread of responses is much higher when looking at specific priorities within the department or departmental perceptions, as shown in Figure 25 above. This indicates that in some cases, the jurisdiction has a much higher opinion than the community, and in some cases, the community has a much higher opinion than staff.

Some of this variation may be due to disagreements between staff and the community about the department's strategic focus or operations. Other variation may point to a need to communicate better about existing programs or to consider the unintentional messaging that may be perceived by community members.

It may also be worth considering how a set of priorities varies within a single jurisdiction, presented in Figure 26 for one mid-sized community.

As noted above, positive numbers on this graph indicate that the staff respondents rated a priority higher than the community respondents did. Thus, even though the community members rated domestic violence response a mid-level priority (5.4), the staff rated it higher (9.3), for a differential of 3.9. By comparison, both the community (9.6) and staff (9.2) rated reducing violence overall as a high priority, which is why the differential between those two ratings is so small (-0.4). By reviewing such disparities, a jurisdiction might

**FIGURE 26** Mid-Sized Jurisdiction (Staff vs. Community Respondents)



Positive numbers indicate a higher priority rating by staff as opposed to community respondents. Smaller numbers indicate less of a difference between staff and community ratings.

determine where additional community engagement is warranted, such as better explaining the policing issues surrounding the mentally ill.

The goals of this project were to get a sense of the state of the practice and to inform the path forward, not to assign positive or negative ratings to any particular department or second-guess their priority setting. As such, and to encourage frank reporting, there was no intent to call out responses by jurisdiction name or individual respondent. However, a similar listening post effort may be appropriate within any jurisdictions, either to validate the priorities that may have been set by the department or as part of a community-involved strategic plan, or to get a better handle on the intentional or unintentional messaging they are sending.

Many jurisdictions have some apparatus for police-community relations, oversight, or review. This may be an appropriate venue for such discussions, or beyond that, it may be beneficial for individual jurisdictions to conduct micro-versions of this survey to see how such disagreements or tensions may be playing out locally.

### Rethinking the Requirements

From the Progressive Era to subsequent reform efforts, police recruiting has included civil service exams and other systems to help guarantee an open and unbiased process. As important as those systems are to addressing discrimination, there is also a move to modernize human resources management as Google and other companies pioneer new workplace dynamics. While

**TABLE 7** Disqualifying Criteria Compared to Perceptions of the Quality of Recruits

	Candidate is disqualified for:	Not disqualified for:
Past drug use	2.8	2.9
Bad credit history	2.9	2.9

Quality ratings were assessed on a scale of 1-4: Consistently high (4), Improving (3), Declining (2) and Consistently Low (1). Averages shown are for all respondents in jurisdictions responding to questions on disqualifying criteria, as compared to the disqualifying criteria shared by Human Resources staff.

police departments are not likely to adopt nonhierarchical structures, casual dress codes, or work-from-home policies, as they face challenges in recruiting qualified officers, they may want to review the strategies other organizations are implementing.

As an example, the United States Army has increased its use of signing bonuses (particularly for sought-after skills) and its waiver of prior conduct standards, particularly as it pertains to marijuana usage.<sup>4</sup> As noted in Figure 15, only 43 percent disqualified recruits for prior drug use, while 36 percent disqualified those who failed a credit check. Comparing these standards to the perceptions of the quality of recruits, there does not appear to be a detrimental impact on the quality of recruits (see Table 7). For a more complete understanding, such ratings should be evaluated both before and after any changes in policy, along with consideration of the programs that might be in place to monitor or assist those recruits (e.g., employee assistance counseling, follow-up drug testing, financial literacy education).

Similar outside-the-box thinking might be applied to other aspects of the recruitment, application, and testing process. As Leonard Matarese of the Center for Public Safety Excellence has noted, “Current criteria often revolve around areas like physical capabilities, written tests, and educational level, but no one has ever determined whether any of those things are predictors of success in today’s environment.”<sup>5</sup>

From a strategic perspective, departments should consider for themselves which job requirements are core to their mission and vision, which factors may be of benefit from the standpoint of obtaining the quality

or characteristics of recruits desired (e.g., for bilingual, technical, or problem-solving skills), and which may merit some reevaluation.

### Recommendations

- **Focus on the skills, not the department.** If the jurisdiction is seeking staff who can build trust, solve problems, and de-escalate a crisis, the ways to find those candidates may be more varied than the traditional approaches. (See [Checklist for 21st Century Police Recruitment](#).)

The graphic features the ICMA logo in the top right corner. Below it, the title "CHECKLIST FOR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICE RECRUITMENT" is displayed in a blue header. Underneath the title is a subtitle: "Tips for recruiting police chiefs and officers to meet today's and tomorrow's needs". The main body of the graphic contains a list of 12 items, each preceded by a small square checkbox. The items provide specific advice on recruiting chiefs and officers, such as reviewing position descriptions, ensuring qualifications include personal characteristics, gaining perspectives from staff, inviting community input, involving the communications department, prioritizing service orientation, considering nontraditional candidates, looking for recruits in their neighborhoods, tapping civilians for jobs, considering cadet programs, and revisiting traditional criteria.

<sup>4</sup> *Army Using Drug Waivers, Bonuses to Fill Ranks*, Associated Press, August 2, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> *The Changing Face of Policing: Recruitment in the 21st Century*, <https://icma.org/articles/article/changing-face-policing-recruitment-21st-century>, August 8, 2017.

- *Consider the ways in which community engagement may assist in serving the public or fighting crime.* Sexual violence can be underreported in cases where there is a lack of trust in the police department or where the victim is a member of a marginalized group within the community.<sup>6</sup> Where the department works to build those relationships and trust, there may be a greater willingness to seek justice and a greater sense that one's voice will be heard.
- *Build the stakeholder networks that will facilitate both community relations and the department's own recruitment success.* As respondents noted, the most effective means of recruiting was by word of mouth or already-established relationships, such as through school or neighborhood outreach. And where that outreach includes linkages to minority communities, that may also improve departmental ability to recruit a more diverse pool of officers that better reflects the community being served.
- *Align the messaging.* While the recruitment strategies and marketing images reported in this survey appear to align, this is an issue to which all jurisdictions should pay attention, to avoid sending one message via strategic plans, public pronouncements, and community liaison work, and potentially sending a conflicting one when recruiting the next generation of officers (e.g., images of community engagement vs. high-speed chases).
- *Pursue accreditation or commit to a course of continuous improvement.* Whether through national or international organizations such as the Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) or state agencies, accreditation places a focus on professionalism, adoption of leading practices, procedural and management excellence, and effective two-way communication with the community.
- *Consider a "stat program" approach.* As with accreditation, the goal of a stat program is not to achieve quick victories through high-profile sweeps or broken windows enforcement. Rather, such programs focus on the strategic outcomes sought by the department, the rigorous collection and analysis of related data, and most importantly, the regular follow-up on that performance information to ensure that where there has been less-than-optimal performance, appropriate action plans are implemented, evaluated, and adjusted as necessary. And while the focus of stat discussions is often on crime and clearance rates, the goals, methods, and outcomes of the recruitment process can be part of that data review as well.<sup>7</sup>
- *Develop an accountability plan* that includes consideration of how data is shared with the public, how often it is updated, and how it is contextualized or explained. Open data efforts often stop with a "data dump" that leave the layperson unsure of how to access or interpret an overwhelming volume of information. Where a more comprehensive plan is in place, a public information officer, community liaison, or ombudsperson might then take the lead on communicating about the available resources with community groups, civilian oversight boards, or the local media. Such a plan could also clearly delineate departmental policies and commitments regarding incident-related data, such as body-worn camera recordings, or the confidentiality of disciplinary proceedings. This, in turn, could contribute to both trust on the part of the community and clear expectations on the part of the officers.
- *Consider the revolving door.* In any given jurisdiction, the challenge with recruiting may have more to do with how many staff are leaving the organization, and when and why they are leaving. If staff are leaving within their first few years, that may be related to limited opportunities for advancement, a perception of greener pastures elsewhere, or dissatisfaction with some aspect of departmental operations. If there is a current or expected wave of retirements, there may be a need to incorporate succession planning and mentoring into the development of the next cadre of leaders. Whatever the circumstances, exploring those factors in exit interviews or regular employee appraisals is an important part of determining how the recruitment, onboarding, and training processes might need to be fine-tuned.

6 *Executive Guidebook, Practical Approaches for Strengthening Law Enforcement's Response to Sexual Assault*, Police Executive Research Forum, 2017.

7 For further background, see <https://www.compstat360.org/>, or *The PerformanceStat Potential: A Leadership Strategy for Producing Results*, by Robert D. Behn, Brookings Institution Press, 2014.



- *Plan for the skills that will be needed in 10 years.*  
In recruiting new officers today, don't assume that the skills they will need will be the same ones that were needed a decade ago. As technology and data analytics play an increasing role in operations, and as community engagement appears key to both law enforcement and recruiting, look for those who can meet those needs, and just as importantly, for those who can be adaptable enough to meet the needs you don't even know about yet.

### Next Steps and Further Research

Rather than being a collection of separate surveys, this study involved communities within which multiple staff and community members participated. As such, beyond looking at the larger issues raised above, it is also possible to analyze in greater detail the differences between staff and community responses, police and community responses, or police and management responses within individual jurisdictions. That level of detail is not presented in this report, but it may be discussed further in some of the follow-up presentations planned, including a webinar, a presentation at the ICMA Annual Conference, and a related article in *Public Management (PM)* magazine.

Among the questions reserved for future research are:

- How are recruitment practices changing? What strategies are being abandoned, what is being added, and what if anything is being done to assess the efficacy of the newer approaches? Are jurisdictions taking a data-driven approach to keep what works, or are they relying on the more traditional approaches without such outcome assessment?
- What do recruits themselves have to say about the recruitment process? While this survey included line police officers and asked them about recruitment practices, more targeted questions of those just-hired or just completing academy training might focus on what attracted them to the profession, how they research potential employers, and how they are deciding among the various policing agencies to which they could apply.
- What are the gaps in existing training efforts that should be the subject of further curriculum development and/or regular refreshers? These may be in areas of longstanding law enforcement concern (e.g., domestic violence) or in areas of emerging priorities (e.g., cybercrime). While this survey touched on the current content and scheduling of training, it did not inquire as to how that training content is determined.

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