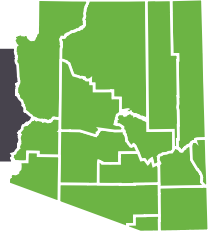**RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF ARIZONA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT AND FIRE SERVICE PERSONNEL**

Public Service Leader Interviews and Policy Review for Retention and Recruitment of Public Safety Personnel

ASU

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Index

Cover Photos:
(Right) Connie Tyler, Phoenix Police Department, Public Information Officer, Retired.

Key Takeaways

The report contains findings from in-depth interviews with public service leaders across the state and a foundational literature review, both conducted by a research team at Arizona State University and funded by the Arizona Board of Regents' Technology and Research Initiative Fund (ABOR TRIF). The results from the interviews and review are summarized below.

Our team spoke with 64 public safety leaders across Arizona to explore the scope of the problem in the Arizona context. We conducted in-depth interviews with local leaders in law enforcement, fire service, and local government. The interviews focused on local issues of recruitment and retention. Six significant themes emerged from the interviews. In the interview section below, we discuss these six themes and share how some jurisdictions attempt to address them.

The foundational policy review analyzed previous reports and academic literature to present five common recruitment and retention practices that Arizona jurisdictions may want to consider. The policy review highlights these common practices and the limited research supporting them. While these are potential paths for policy makers to consider, they do not reflect recommendations from the research team. Alongside each common practice, we present a narrative overview of the academic literature and previous reports in this area.

Overall, our research found some areas where law enforcement and fire service share similar struggles, and some areas where these two professions differ. There is substantial evidence that law enforcement agencies struggle more with recruitment and retention than fire service agencies, particularly given recent scrutiny of the law enforcement profession. Throughout the discussion of our findings, we highlight differences between rural, suburban, and urban jurisdictions.

Main Findings from Leadership Interviews

Pay and benefits are a key driver of recruitment and retention.

Discussions of pay, benefits, and retirement focused on both the immediate – i.e., pay that public safety officers are receiving now - and changes that have been made over time or that need to be made long-term. There was consensus among the leaders interviewed that the challenges surrounding pay and benefits were similar for fire service and law enforcement agencies. That noted, pay was the largest concern discussed, particularly for those who work in communities with high costs of living, which are often also areas with low housing stock. Participants from urban, suburban, and rural areas pointed to pay issues and the mismatch between compensation and the cost of living.

Local agencies have implemented several promising reforms. Participants in fire service and law enforcement professions discussed changes to the pay scale and longevity pay to stay competitive with other agencies and to help with retention efforts. The challenge is that many large agencies have also similarly adapted their hiring plans, so it is more difficult to stand out in the labor market. However, such strategies are a direct function of available resources, and many participants stressed that their organizations do not have the funding available to implement these reforms.

Some participants highlighted strategies to help alleviate some of the challenges of high housing costs. Strategies included offering a "moving assistance program," for instance, through a one-time relocation bonus. Another strategy mentioned by a participant relied on a bonus to help pay for a down payment or

closing costs, but this bonus was conditional on retention. Employees who leave before the specified period (eight years) will return a prorated amount to the city. Finally, a participant described a partnership model with the local school district to build smaller homes adjacent to the local elementary school and offer these at a discounted rent to public safety personnel.

Pensions and retirement benefits are one part of recruitment and retention.

Pensions have traditionally been a key part of recruitment and retention for law enforcement and fire service professionals. For many leaders, generous retirement benefits are a large part of what drew them to the profession. However, many leaders indicated that they perceived that pensions didn't have the same draw for younger potential employees, as many recruits denote that they do not expect to be in the same position for twenty or more years, making a defined benefit pension less appealing. There is some evidence that pensions may still serve as an important component of an effective retention package.

There was little consensus on how the state pension system should be changed. Some leaders argued that the state should shift away from defined benefits and provide contributions to a 401K. Others contend that agencies should do more to promote the benefits of defined benefit plans.

Hiring processes could be revised to enhance recruitment.

The recruitment and hiring processes used by many organizations have not changed substantially in decades, which has been linked to the reduction in staffing. Participants noted the lengthy hiring process, including the time it takes candidates to complete the academy, is a deterrent for some employees who need immediate employment; therefore, they may take another job in healthcare or a related industry instead of fire service and law enforcement.

A few solutions were offered. First, participants stressed the importance of continuous and proactive communication and follow-up with candidates through the hiring process to mitigate uncertainty. Second, other agencies have made employment conditional on completing training. Several sheriff's offices place potential new hires in corrections officer positions while they wait for the lengthy background check. Participants discussed a new state law that allows jurisdictions to seek reimbursement of training expenses if a newly hired public safety officer leaves the jurisdiction for another Arizona jurisdiction. This policy, however, has yet to be evaluated.[1]

Several organizations have also embraced technology and other new efforts to recruit new employees. Many organizations have enhanced their online, and in particular social media, presence to encourage more workers to apply. Adopting new communication methods, like podcasts, also has the potential to encourage new workers to consider law enforcement and fire service careers. Other agencies have opened their doors to showcase the variety of technological tools of the job, like crime analysis centers, new technology in cars, and drones. Highlighting the service and technological elements of the work has the potential to encourage a new generation of workers to apply.

Employees look for quality of life and balance in work.

Police and fire service employees, traditionally, have worked a considerable amount of overtime hours. Still, there is a general perception that many new workers want more flexibility in work requirements. Unfortunately, many agencies have had to mandate overtime in recent years because of workforce recruitment and retention

issues, which participants felt has further hurt retention. Shift work was a particular challenge raised by fire service participants, as the long hours away became more difficult as they had children, got married, or had other life responsibilities.

Given current labor shortages, the participants could not provide insights into the best way to improve balance for new workers. One area of future inquiry would be to conduct a cost-benefit analysis that considers the financial efficacy of relying on overtime versus hiring more employees. It may be that changing the nature of shift work, coupled with an increase in staffing, could allow for more flexibility for staff to attend to family needs, thereby increasing retention; but there is little existing research or effective policy in this area.

Advances in providing mental and physical health services are plentiful, but more is needed.

Public safety jobs are physically and mentally taxing, and there was a consensus among participants that job stressors influence recruitment and retention and the overall work climate. Physical health was a particular concern for fire service personnel, while law enforcement leaders discussed mental health concerns like PTSD and trauma. The policy suggestions were similar for the groups and included regular mental and physical health screenings and on-the-job support. Overall, law enforcement and fire service leaders felt that large strides have been made in providing physical and mental health support, but more work in this area could be done. They also felt it was crucial to keep up-to-date with any new services and programming to help support the mental and physical health of workers, and that this would be especially impactful on retention. In addition, leadership should reinforce a culture that eliminates stigmatization of behavioral health care and promotes follow-up.

Rural agencies have unique needs.

Participants in rural Arizona highlighted unique challenges in recruitment and retention of law enforcement and fire service employees, especially regarding employees with families. These challenges included the lack of educational options, the perceived quality of those options, and the limited availability of shopping, movies, and other offerings available in Arizona's metro and suburban areas.

In addition, rural participants voiced concerns over the funding structures of fire service and law enforcement agencies, which typically favored large metropolitan areas. Many rural participants highlighted the inability to fund salary increases, leaving them less competitive and more likely to lose new and tenured personnel to agencies in urban or suburban areas.

Rural police leaders also highlighted the lack of equal access to training academies. As noted, many agencies don't have the financial means to supply regular training. In addition, the long duration of the academy makes it difficult for participants to match personnel to workforce needs and to keep up with attrition (e.g., due to retirements), resulting in organizations falling behind on their multi-year hiring plans.

Public Service Leadership Interview Results and Analysis

Introduction

To better understand the scope of the public safety recruitment and retention problem in Arizona, we conducted 64 in-depth interviews with local leaders from law enforcement, fire service, and local government from across the state. Interviews were approximately an hour and focused on specific recruitment and retention efforts in each jurisdiction and a discussion of the professions broadly. See Figure 1 for a map of participating jurisdictions and see Appendix 1 for a full discussion of our methods.

Figure 1. Heat map of participants by county.
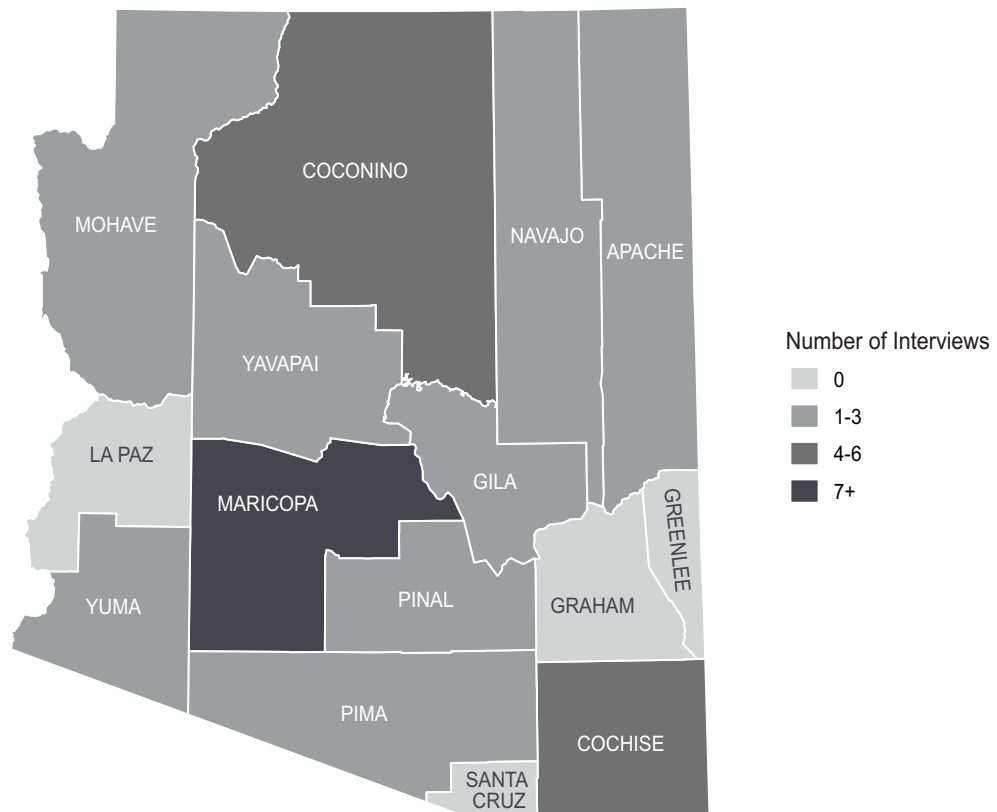
Here, we highlight the significant themes that emerged from the interviews - pay, benefits, and retirement; hiring processes; housing and financial challenges; stressors and health; and generational differences.

Pay, Benefits, and Retirement

Discussions of pay, benefits, and retirement focused on both the immediate - pay that public safety officers are receiving now - and changes that have been made over time or that need to be made long-term. There was general consensus among the leaders interviewed that the challenges surrounding pay and benefits were similar for fire service and police agencies. That noted, pay was the largest concern within their organizations, particularly for those individuals who work in communities with high costs of living, which was often coupled with low housing stock.

Pay

Discussions of pay focused on competition between agencies within the state as well as pay structure. Participants discussed the need to offer signing bonuses to attract candidates or keep them from signing with other agencies. They also discussed increasing overall compensation packages and identified the need to keep up with inflation as well as the competitive housing market in the state. Some participants discussed how compensation packages could make it difficult for candidates to really understand what they are being offered. Since compensation could include things like take home cars, housing allowances, and professional development funds it may be hard to compare packages across agencies.

Participants in both the fire service and law enforcement professions discussed changes to the pay scale and longevity pay to stay competitive with other agencies and to help with retention efforts. For many, this meant updating the way that steps in pay work. For example, a law enforcement leader with over 40 years of experience discussed changes to the pay scale:

> **We recently restructured our pay scale so we're competitive with all the cities. We used to have 16 steps. And which was totally out of line. And now we moved it down to eight. We're in line with all the other cities. We also created a, not a longevity system… We actually inverted it. We pay you to stay at the beginning. So, the first year you get a – and I should have studied more, – but I think it's $2,500 at the end. When you come off probation, you get a check for $2,500 for staying with us a year, and then over the next five years. Then the next year you stay, you get $2,000, and then you get $1,500 and then way down to zero. So, you get to about five years, and we feel like either you're going to stay or go at the five-year mark. And now you're high enough in the pay scale, where you're pretty much set.**

Similarly, a law enforcement leader with over 20 years of experience discussed how his agency worked with local government leaders to change the pay structure in his department:

> **We used to have like a 16-step process for you to become a top-out police officer. And some officers who've been here that long. You know, we're nowhere near that because we have a very young core of officers. So in 16 years you may, you may get topped out. So you know, seeing how the trend was of other agencies, offering money and lowering these steps, our department's leadership and city management, city leadership worked together to reduce our steps from 16 to nine steps. So in nine years, an officer can go from entry-level to top-out pay.**

Both examples designate the importance of increasing pay earlier in the career course to retain new employees. This is not to say that retaining long-term employees is not a priority. There were several participants who emphasized the importance of longevity pay as well. One 45-year-old male local government leader with seven years of experience from a rural area discussed it this way:

> ❝ About three to four years ago, we implemented an anniversary set. It's basically longevity pay. So, every two years on your anniversary date, you move up the step in the pay plan, which is, it's 2.5%. We saw that folks were getting to this area, and their salaries were just remaining stagnant. So, if you haven't left, it means you do a good job (..) Then, about two and a half years ago, we implemented a separate one specifically for law enforcement. And so it's a little more aggressive for law enforcement, if I'm remembering, I believe it's tiered. And so you get a base amount and then a dollar amount added onto that for every year service. So, at five years your base amount is one, and in 10 years it's another, and in 15 years it's another so it tiers up and it gets to be pretty aggressive. ❞

An alternative strategy mentioned by a 53-year-old male with ten years of experience as fire chief is to compete on culture:

> ❝ Because I think if we have a good culture, inviting, respectful work environment that people enjoy coming in, then they're more likely to stay than leave. So, our hope is quality, paying benefits that are as competitive as we can be with the limited funding that we have. But I think more importantly, it's setting the culture that is inviting. ❞

Benefits and Retirement

Benefits were largely discussed as they related to housing and health (described in more depth below.) Retirement was a major point of discussion throughout our interviews. Discussions of retirement focused on timing - when personnel decided to retire - and discussions of retirement benefits - the structure, appeal, and generosity of the benefits.

Participants shared that recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and calls to defund the police led some officers to retire earlier than originally anticipated. While multiple participants pointed to recent changes in the retirement system that would allow public safety officers to work and continue to increase their salaries for seven more years than previously allowed, they said that few officers took advantage of the program given COVID and political stressors. A 58-year-old male police chief with 35 years of experience describes some of what he has observed:

> ❝ That 2020-2021 timeframe, we saw a lot of people just retiring that had originally planned to stay longer, but just got tired of the headache and the frustration and being called names and stuff. So, we did see a lot of people leave during that period. ❞

Similarly, a 32-year-old female local government employee with ten years of experience in an urban area explains the influence of the political climate on retention during the pandemic:

> ❝ So, we also saw during the pandemic people would sign up for DROP, but they wouldn't even stay the full five years.[i] And we're like what? And I mean, that's around some of the time when there was some political aptitude change. So there was a sentiment that they didn't want to be part of that. ❞

Retirement benefits were also discussed as a potential benefit for recruitment and retention. Multiple participants pointed to generational differences with regard to retirement benefits. Many of the leaders we spoke with discussed the generous retirement benefits as part of why they got in and stayed in the profession. Some of these same leaders noted that the attitudes and expectations are different for many people just starting their careers. For more recent recruits, there is no expectation that they will stay in the same position for 20 or more years, so the idea of a defined benefits pension system is not as appealing. Some leaders acknowledged that when they started their careers, they did not think much about retirement, but now, since they put in so many years, they see how important their retirement benefits are. A fire service leader, with 32 years of experience describes his positive perception of the program. He describes the public safety retirement system:

> ❝ In Arizona or PSPRS. The public safety personnel retirement system is a very, very good program. You know, there's a lot of guys that get out and they can live. Well, you know, they put a lot of money into it. So it's a fantastic program. It's changed a lot over the years. You know we're seeing changes in how that retirement is calculated and how it pays out. It kind of mirrors the economy to an extent. But I think the public safety retirement for us and law enforcement is definitely part of the driving factor for people coming into the career field. ❞

Leaders approached generational differences in two distinct ways. Some argued that the state should shift away from defined benefits and provide more generous contributions to portable 401K options that would be more appealing to younger generations. Others argued that younger generations just didn't understand how good the retirement benefits are, and that agencies should do more to help young people understand the benefits of defined benefits plans. There was some discussion of how the defined benefits plans have been updated, and it takes longer for new recruits to fully realize the benefits than their older counterparts. However, most still acknowledged that people just starting in the field didn't fully understand how the plans work and changes to the plan did not have much of an impact on recruitment. However, generous retirement benefits are not seen as appealing as they were to previous generations from a recruitment perspective. It is important to denote that the focus of this work was with more established leaders, and it is important to capture the perspectives of new workers, or those who applied for public safety jobs and did not accept a position, to truly understand the most appropriate way to consider reform to benefits.

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i   The most recent updates allow officers to stay for seven rather than five years. However, the quote mentioned five years and we have kept it accurate to the comments of the participant.

Hiring Processes

Recruitment

Participants discussed a competitive recruitment environment for law enforcement and fire service in rural, suburban, and urban areas. In addition to competing with fellow agencies, they noted that they are competing against new professions and types of work. For example, leaders in fire service discussed competing with the healthcare industry for candidates with EMT or medical response backgrounds. Law enforcement leaders emphasized that there is increased competition with agencies competing for sign on bonuses and hiring incentives. Participants pointed to this time as unique, with recruitment challenges they had not historically experienced. For example, a 42-year-old male with 14 years of experience in law enforcement describes, "… We're competitive, but we're not at the top. So, there's always somebody who always pays more and gets bigger bonuses all the time. But public safety is so desperate for candidates that we're stealing from each other like we've never done in our history."

Some rural communities acknowledge that they cannot compete when it comes to pay with larger, more suburban, and urban agencies; instead, they try to recruit based on lifestyle factors. One local government leader with seven years of experience discussed it this way:

> ❝ **We know we can't compete with the Valley as far as pay, but our main methodology, our own philosophy was, we don't want to make the choice so obvious for our deputies. So, when they look at a 10 to 12 to 15,000 increase, that's a pretty obvious choice, like I'm going to go down to Gilbert, Chandler, Phoenix. So, our goal is to get that down into that $5,000 range, are you really going to move for $5,000? What we offer here is a different quality of life that really appeals to people. Very outdoor, very, very small town and that works for a lot of people rather than a bigger city. So that trade off of 4, 5, $6,000 that makes sense for them.** ❞

While the recruitment environment is challenging, many leaders pointed to changes they're making in the hiring process to streamline the process and remove unnecessary barriers.

Length of Hiring Process

Participants noted the lengthy hiring process, including the time it takes candidates to complete the academy, as a significant challenge. As noted by one town manager with 30 years of experience on hiring new police officers: "… from the time we hire someone to get them through the Academy and get them through FTO [field training officer] … You're looking at between 18 months and two years … So, it's an enormous financial investment …" In addition to the financial investment, the long duration of the academy makes it difficult for participants to match personnel to workforce needs and to keep up with attrition (e.g., due to retirements), resulting in organizations falling behind on their multi-year hiring plans. These challenges were exacerbated for rural and smaller organizations.

New hires and leadership emphasized the challenges of the lengthy process for individual candidates. Waiting three to six months on background checks and other screenings is often not financially viable for candidates. Additionally, participants noted that the uncertainty from the long wait times and the administrative

burdens associated with paperwork as part of the application process didn't necessarily match the pay and compensation associated with the positions.

A few solutions were offered. First, participants stressed the importance of continuous and proactive communication and follow-up with candidates through the hiring process to help counteract some of the long wait times and uncertainty. Providing status updates can help break down the wait time and reassure candidates. Second, participants denote that they try to create upfront commitment by hiring candidates in the testing phase and making their employment conditional on completing their training. This approach establishes a default of being "in" rather than "out." In addition, several participants from sheriff's offices also noted a successful strategy of temporarily getting new hires into jails as corrections officers since the background checks for these positions are much faster. This approach gets candidates on the payroll quickly, it can help instill invaluable skills for street-level police work, and it helps alleviate staffing shortages in jails.

Finally, participants suggested that a state or local policy to help reimburse departments for their financial investments if they lose a public safety employee during the training phase could help reduce some risks associated with recruiting new employees. A new law recently went into effect that allows jurisdictions to seek reimbursement of training expenses if a newly hired public safety officer leaves the jurisdiction for another Arizona jurisdiction.[2] It is yet to be seen if this new policy has much of an effect on movement between jurisdictions. One critique of the new policy is that it requires that the agency losing the employee seek reimbursement, putting the onus on the often smaller jurisdiction losing the employee to a larger jurisdiction. Others have noted that agencies may be reluctant to seek reimbursement, since it may damage the collaborative relationship between jurisdictions. Our research team will monitor the implementation of this new policy as it goes into effect.

EMT Requirement and Training Equivalency (Fire Service)

Fire service participants pointed to the EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) requirement as a significant obstacle in identifying and recruiting from a broader, more diverse, and more local pool of applicants. Fire service participants described removing applicants' EMT requirements and moving this training in-house. However, this requires some capacity and funding that especially rural and smaller organizations have raised concerns over.

Participants also noted the inefficiency of a lack of equivalency between training completed outside Arizona for out-of-state hires, which was a barrier to recruiting people from out of state. One fire chief with 36 years of experience commented on the lack of reciprocity: "… another shot to our head, that's only good in the State of Arizona. And, if you did have that same training in Wisconsin, and brought it into Arizona, there's no reciprocity. We're– we're killing ourselves." Participants suggested introducing a bridge academy of shorter duration (e.g., three to four weeks) that could help ensure out-of-state candidates' skills are solid. A bridge program would help introduce some equivalency to the training completed in other states and get people into service quicker.

Academy and Continued Training

Participants pointed to the lack of availability or access to academies as an important barrier. This issue is especially important for rural and smaller organizations that do not run their own academies and thus have to rely on availability at academies serving multiple organizations. One 64-year-old male police chief with 43 years of experience identified academy availability as a frequent topic of discussion among law enforcement leadership:

> **It's an issue every day of the week. We talk about vacancies and how we can get people in academy classes. And do we have enough slots for academies? And it is a– probably one of our top discussion topics that go on at the command staff level.**

Some smaller organizations look to partner with local community colleges that run academies or send their recruits to larger communities to attend academies. These options mean that they are beholden to open slots and the timing of academies in academic institutions or larger jurisdictions. The academy structure in Arizona is more decentralized than many other states. One 54-year-old male town manager with 30 years of experience in a suburban area who previously worked in another state made the point below:

> **The other thing I would add for you that is concerning to me is the availability of police academies in Arizona. It is less than what our needs are. We are sending people primarily to [nearby larger city] to their police academy, and there aren't a whole lot of other options for us to send folks to. And so coming from [another state], where we had a number of institutions where we could put people through, including community college police academies. That structure doesn't exist in Arizona, and it is a recruitment hurdle for us. [Nearby larger city] is also hiring their own people and putting them in there. And there have been a couple of times we've had more candidates, and then they've had academy slots, and we've had to have that person work in a non-sworn capacity until we get them into a police academy. So, availability of training academy is certainly an issue within this state from our perspective.**

In other states, the academy process is commonly run in conjunction with higher education institutions, either through the community college or university system, meaning that academies are not being run by jurisdictions competing for talent.

In addition to limited slots, participants raised concerns about the costs of sending candidates to academies. The gradual decrease in state funding allocated to academy training from Arizona's Peace Officer Standards and Training Board (POST) has exacerbated this concern. A 52-year-old female police chief with more than 25 years' experience in an urban area noted that the decrease in funding has been gradual, but has important implications:

> **Many years ago, we'd send someone to the Academy and it's like the legislature would give AZ Post so much money which would take care of that. And now, every year, you know, the meals went away first right, and then the housing went away. The housing reimbursement went away. And here we are.**

This reduction in funding means that many jurisdictions are filling in the funding gaps. Money that used to be allocated from the state legislature to POST is now no longer available, so local governments are dipping into their budgets to cover the gaps. This is a cost burden shift from the state to local governments, which rural communities have a harder time absorbing.

Several participants stressed increasing the availability of academies. Increasing availability doesn't necessarily mean building in-house academies or training capacity, especially for rural and smaller organizations. However, establishing a more robust infrastructure of academies, for instance, through partnerships with community colleges or other local educational institutions, could help increase access to academies for law enforcement and fire service organizations outside the larger metropolitan areas.

Housing and Financial Challenges

Participants across the state and in both law enforcement and fire service emphasized several interrelated financial challenges related to cost of living and housing as significant barriers to recruiting and retaining law enforcement officers and firefighters. Participants from urban, suburban, and rural areas all pointed to pay issues and the mismatch between compensation and the cost of living.

Housing

Many participants highlighted housing and the unaffordable housing market situation across Arizona as the number one barrier to recruitment and retention. Considering salary levels and the inability to adjust wages in some organizations, this has created a large gap in which new hires cannot afford to live in – or sometimes even close to – the community they serve. Tenured personnel who have lived in their communities for many years typically have seen very large increases in their property values, which, among some organizations, has created a 'double whammy' in the sense that older employees have cashed in on the housing market and moved away while new hires cannot afford to enter the local housing market. For example, a police operational services director in an affluent suburban jurisdiction with over 25 years of human resources management experience explains how the cost of housing has changed over time and now impedes candidates from living in the community they serve:

> **If I wouldn't have bought it then, I wouldn't be living here. And it's – it's tripled actually, almost quadrupled. And that too will come down, but it definitely is a barrier, because right now we have gas prices that are very expensive to fill up your cars. I tell my entire family, "Manage your trips. If you're going out, you've got to go to Target to return something, do the other things you have to do as well." And that's just the reality that we face today. So that definitely is a barrier. Some officers like to live outside of the city in which they serve.**

> **But for people coming out of state especially, they're looking at, "Okay, well, I don't really know [affluent suburb city] the area," but they begin to look at homes or condos or apartments and the cost. And then they like, "Ooh, we can't do that, or it's gonna– I'm gonna have to find a home that's 30 minutes or 45 minutes away." So that's a deterrent. So that's, I think, our biggest hurdle right now.** 🙿

Additionally, this challenge has created several downstream issues. Participants pointed to the fact that many employees now have significant commutes, which is both a financial burden given the general cost of living crisis and puts pressure on schedules to allow for commute times. A male fire chief with 36 years of experience explained how the cost of commuting shaped employment decisions, "Housing is a huge issue. It used to be our work schedule allowed you to live in another community and commute. Now all the costs associated with commuting are tough, so people want it to live and reside in the community they serve." A 52-year-old male fire chief with 27 years of experience described how commutes shaped organizational considerations:

> 🙾 **We're looking at the schedule change, so I can recruit from a farther area because I've got an affordable housing problem. My new firefighters are like I can't afford rent in [current suburban city]. I can't afford rent in [adjacent suburban city]. So I gotta go far, far away. And then you look at gas prices. So that's probably some aspects that are challenging us right now is affordability of living, gas prices, and how far. Do I have a schedule that allows me to live 30 min or 40 min or an hour from where I work?** 🙿

Participants also noted that it may create a "disconnect" between the employees' immediate social environment and the community they serve professionally. A 53-year-old male who has served as a fire chief for ten years describes the increase in hiring commuters:

> 🙾 **We don't (have folks commuting) right now because a lot of our folks are still - they've been here for the long haul. So they grew up in this area. And they started here. But over the last 10 years since I've been here we've hired more from outside of the area. And then we lost two of them within three weeks of each other. One was only here nine weeks and the academy, never been here like 12 or 15 months. So it's drawing people into an area that they can't live, where they're willing to commute. And then when you do that you end up with commuter firefighters that aren't committed to the community. And now you have a challenge with cultural issues long-term… so I can identify the problem today.** 🙿

Some participants highlighted strategies to help alleviate some of the high housing costs. Strategies included offering a moving assistance program, for instance, through a one-time relocation bonus. Another strategy mentioned by a participant relied on a bonus to help pay for a down payment or closing costs, but this bonus was conditional on retention. Employees who leave before the specified period (eight years) will return a prorated

amount to the city. Finally, a participant described a partnership model with the local school district to build smaller homes adjacent to the local elementary school and offer these at a discounted rent to public safety personnel.

Family and Education

Participants in rural communities highlighted some unique challenges in recruitment and retention, especially regarding employees with families. These challenges included the lack of educational options or the perceived quality of those options and the limited availability of shopping, movies, and other offerings available in Arizona's metro and suburban areas.

There were no immediate solutions to this challenge other than identifying candidates' interests and personal situations upfront to ensure a good fit. One participant noted that he is sending his elementary-aged child to school remotely because there are limited school choice options in his area. However, he recognized that may not be an option for all families.

Stressors and Health

Public safety jobs are physically and mentally taxing, and there was a general consensus among participants that stressors influence recruitment and retention and the overall work climate. Fire service participants discussed how their job can affect their health in more physical ways through things like cancer and exposure to toxins. Law enforcement participants, on the other hand, discussed more mental health concerns like PTSD and trauma. That noted, the policy suggestions were similar for the groups, which included regular mental and physical health screenings and on-the-job support. Overall, law enforcement and fire service leaders felt that large strides have been made in providing physical and mental health support, but more work in this area could be done. They also felt it was crucial to keep up to date with any new services and programming to help support workers, particularly for retention efforts.

Fire Service

Health concerns emerged as barriers to recruitment and retention for fire service agencies. A 45-year-old male fire service participant with 24 years of experience in an urban area discussed that the deciding factor between becoming a firefighter and another career could be health concerns. There have been recent changes to disability law that offer supplemental support for individuals who work as firefighters and have an eventual cancer diagnosis.[3] He felt that recent headlines around cancer and firefighting might have dissuaded some from applying and noted, "People who have considered a career are now looking at cancer. Now, that's another factor. If you're looking at maybe a hospital system job versus a fire job, that would be one that is a big, big differentiator between the two, right?"

The nature of shift work also was raised as a concern associated with negative health outcomes. A number of participants denoted that the 48-hour schedule led to sleep deprivation. For example, a 53-year-old male fire service participant with ten years of experience in an area that provides services to urban and rural communities describes:

> **And by going through a 48-hour schedule, you're making it worse. And then that sleep deprivation is a carcinogen. Well, we're trying to prevent cancer yet we're going to a shift schedule that makes cancer more prevalent. All the data and science is out there. The only benefit to this is to the employee who says I get more weekends.**

Fire department leaders have taken steps to mitigate the health challenges associated with the job. Leaders denoted that departments have taken large strides in developing new protocols to mitigate risk. For example, a 56-year-old male fire service leader with 30 years of experience in a rural area contrasts new efforts to maintain health with past policies:

> ❝ **You know, when I first started, half the time we wouldn't wear our CBAs in a fire, and all nasty toxins and carcinogens in your, well, and now we take extra measures to clean ourselves. We wash ourselves off before we come in, that, we don't wear our boots into the station. We used to, it was just a free fall, you know we, we'd be proud of our dirty. We wouldn't wash them. We wanted to look tough, and, and now it's you know everything's spit shine, you clean it, get all them carcinogens off.** ❞

A 50-year old male fire service participant in an urban area with 30 years of experience discussed the importance of new health surveillance protocols used in fire service organizations, including annual physicals, stating:

> ❝ **And we do early surveillance so that we identify both genetic predispositions as well as existing cancer markers that are in your body. And, then, we deal with the consequences. I have five new cancer diagnoses over the last month here in the [agency]. And if we didn't have these programs, we would not have found them, and they may have made it through their career. But, early in retirement, we'd lose them.** ❞

Participants also discuss the importance of culture change which prioritizes self-care and supports people taking care of themselves. For example, a male fire service leader in an urban area with 36 years of experience discusses how mentalities have changed in fire service from "sucking it up" to a more supportive organization, stating:

> ❝ **I treat every call, every working fire now is essentially a hazmat call, because we know that when things burn, there's at least 12 known carcinogens that are in every single fire that they're getting exposed to. So, we've become way more sophisticated in the supportive nature of our job versus the – my generation was, you know, "Suck it up, Buttercup," that, you know, you had a tough tour, right?** ❞

Law Enforcement

Many law enforcement leaders denoted that traditionally, law enforcement culture was similar to fire service, in that employees didn't talk about mental health or struggles with substance abuse or family challenges. Now, there is a realization of the need for mental health support, and the types of issues that are addressed

have now widened to include any physical or mental health challenges. Several participants discussed the Craig Tiger Act, which provides counseling services to first responders who have witnessed traumatic events.[4]

For example, a 42-year-old male police participant discussed how many calls can be traumatizing, so having these wellness and mental health resources is important for working through mental health issues. He states:

> ❝ **How many fatalities and shootings, and you know, dead bodies they're seeing. And these can be kids. They can be families, right? So that becomes very taxing. I know myself. I've been to hundreds of fatal crashes, I mean, when I was a district commander, we had 70 fatal crashes in three years out there, and you're talking about some of the most gruesome stuff that people will see. But those mental health and wellness resources are there, so people can qualify under what's called the Craig Tiger Act. There are certain criteria that come with that. If they hit any one of those criteria they can get counseling sessions, and that starts them off with a certain number of counseling sessions. And then, if it needs more based on the situation, they can do that. If they're involved in shootings, we have mandatory, you know, psychological evaluations for them before they can come back to work, and then they can see conditional counseling as well. But again, that goes beyond just the straight, what you might think of as mental health. And on this, it could be financial. It could be marital counseling, substance abuse, whatever it is. ❞**

A 54-year-old female police participant in an urban area with 25 years of experience discusses that there are clinicians in-house to help with counseling and health care, stating:

> ❝ **Yes. So, we have clinicians in-house here that they can come and see, besides the city offering the counseling services, basically. And then, of course, you can always do it through your health care. But we actually have clinicians here. We have what's called our employee wellness bureau that has detectives and supervisors that are assigned to it that can go out for terrible situations that we have, and any officer involved shooting. We send them out to make sure that they're there with the officer. You know. Ensure that they kind of have somebody on their side, feel like there's somebody on their side that can kind of walk them through the process. ❞**

A 41-year-old female police participant with 20 years of experience in an urban area discussed that wellness programs are a huge part of retaining officers and how wellness has become normalized over the years, stating:

> ❝ **I think one of the largest retention pieces is our wellness program, certainly. That's something that's sparking up across the nation to wellness for officers. But I think we started**

that and ramped up before it was kind of talked about much. So we have a pretty robust wellness program that requires, depending on what specialty or unit you're in, mandatory check-ins once or every three years with a counselor to make sure you're doing okay. So it's really ingrained in who we are. 🙶

Overall, law enforcement and fire service leaders felt that they had made great strides in providing holistic health services to their employees. That noted, the job often requires long hours, and in the case of fire service, many consecutive days on the job. There is a new openness to change in this area, but more work and support are needed, particularly around burnout to help retain individuals long-term. Documenting the changes made to the profession, particularly around safety, may help with recruitment of new employees who may not have applied for law enforcement and fire service positions because of the perceived risks and harms of the job.

Generational Differences

One theme that emerged in many interviews was the tension between new employees and more established leaders. Many participants argued that there has been a change in the workforce, which has implications for hiring and retention. For example, participants discussed that younger generations are more likely to have multiple careers in their lifetime, making retirement benefits less of an incentive, given the time needed to serve in a job before being vested. Leaders also perceived that new employees had less trust in the solvency of retirement benefits or didn't understand the long-term implications of this benefit. Further, leaders felt that younger individuals are more focused on jobs that can be done remotely or that have flexibility in scheduling, in order to be able to spend more time with their families.

Fire service and law enforcement leaders indicated that shifts in technology have changed the ways in which they recruit. Organizations are now more focused on recruiting through social media, podcasts, and YouTube. Participants have also discussed that they have broadened the pool of potential recruits. For example, public safety organizations traditionally recruited heavily from individuals with military histories but now look to younger individuals and those with non-traditional backgrounds.

Changing Views of Careers

Many public safety leaders recounted that fire service or law enforcement was a calling for them. They felt this type of singular career focus was not as prevalent in newer hires, which is a challenge for long-term retention. A male fire service leader in an urban area with 36 years of experience contrasted his career trajectory, which included, "Need to define a job I could raise a family on, stick my head down and just grind out a career," whereas:

🙶 **The youngsters that are coming in now are way more agile in their long-term planning. The kids today are way more agile. They are like, "Hey, I'll do this for a while and see how it goes." And so just today, I've had about two or three youngsters let me know that they're going to be leaving, and one is to a different industry, and two is just to different locations in the state or the country. And we're seeing way more of that.** 🙶

He argues that it is important to continue to search for people who see public service as a vocation. Similarly, a 47-year-old female police leader in an urban area with 25 years of experience shared that newer generations are very open to change, making retention difficult, stating:

> ❝ **I think the generational differences that we are seeing have impacted [retention] a lot. I think social media has impacted that a lot. I don't know if it's a long-term thinking thing, like they're not thinking long-term about what their futures are going to be or what their retirements are going to be. They're just very open to change which is good on a lot of levels, but also not great for retention purposes.** ❞

Further, many leaders denoted that law enforcement and fire service employees could make more money by moving from job to job. This was particularly a challenge for rural agencies, who didn't always have the resources to increase wages. A 56-year-old male fire service participant with 30 years of experience in a rural area discussed that younger generations are looking for money, often using smaller departments as stepping stones stating:

> ❝ **They tend to stay because they're in the higher wage brackets. The younger, fresh out of school, early 20 something or they're looking for money. So, the younger ones tend to leave quicker, especially if they're not from our area or close.** ❞

At the same time, retirement packages are not as much of a selling point as they have been in the past. A 64-year-old male police participant in an urban area with 43 years of experience discusses that newer generations do not see long-term benefits as important as prior generations, stating, "We're trying to tell them, 'Hey, you have a retirement,' and they're like; they don't want to think that far down the road… it doesn't connect with them like it did in my generation." He contends that it is important for current leaders to be creative in understanding and responding to the needs of this emerging workforce. He feels that, *"It's almost, we have to almost be very overt and enticing and selling, selling our profession to them a lot more than we ever used to."*

A 61-year-old male police participant in an urban and rural area with 21 years of experience laments the lack of applicants compared to when he was entering the workforce 30 years ago:

> ❝ **There were hundreds of people testing, I mean police officers and firefighters. That was like coveted jobs that everybody wanted, not everybody, but lots of people wanted to do and that has totally shifted. Back then all you had to do is throw something out there in the newspaper, hey? We're hiring, and you know, and they beat the doors down. We do that now. And, we have two or three people show up.** ❞

Technology Shifts

Public safety agencies are adapting to the changing workforce and developing new methods to recruit. Newer generations are being recruited through methods like podcasts, social media posts like TikTok or Instagram, and YouTube videos. Previously, agencies used to find recruits at schools or in the community. Although these methods are different, they do have benefits. Participants discussed that they use social media to recruit people from all over the country.

Several agencies have adapted to the technological shifts with good results. A 53-year-old male fire service participant with 10 years' experience in an agency that covers rural and urban areas discusses the shifts in how they recruit using technology like social media and podcasts. His agency hired an advertising company to help change the way they message recruitment. The focus during recruiting is now on compassion and care for the community. They also discuss the technology used as part of the new fire service, like drones, which highlights the complexity and versatility of the job. They also put out a podcast. He describes the positive results:

> ❝ **And so every week put a podcast out. So, we've, we've done a couple of podcasts now over the last month related to hiring, why come work for us. So last year, we did our hiring process, we had probably our best showing with 78 initial applicants 54 complete applications, and we hired 10.** ❞

The fire service leader goes on to note that although this recruitment cycle didn't alleviate all of the challenges with vacancies, it made a big difference. Several agencies have indicated that they have a dedicated social media staff person who helps manage accounts, answer questions, and work with the general accessibility of the agency. As important, a male police participant in an urban area with 25 years of experience discusses how social media can help with recruiting a more diverse sample of people. He denotes:

> ❝ **That's where affinity groups really help us because they've got a pipeline for people that reach out whether-- it could be gender. It could be race, it could be whatever else. But those partnerships and relationships help widen the net and get the word out, 'Hey, we're hiring.'** ❞

He also notes that the agency is working on widening volunteer opportunities, which gets new and different people interested in the field. Similarly, a police officer in an urban area notes that opening the doors of the department has helped people better understand the nuances of the job. She describes the recruitment efforts:

> ❝ **He kind of brought that [humanity] into the police department of… hey, 'Let's show you our technology, and how state of the art some of our things are, and here's our range and our gym, and where patrol works out of,' and it really gives people, you know, a picture of where they would be, because half of patrol works out of our building. So it gives them kind of an inside look that often you don't get until later in the process with other agencies. You get to do a ride along or something and then we've really focused on kind of harnessing online strategies.** ❞

PUBLIC SERVICE LEADER INTERVIEWS AND POLICY REVIEW FOR RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL

Other agencies have also worked with younger officers to showcase the variety of technological tools on the job, like crime analysis centers, new technology in cars, and drones.

A male police participant in an urban area with 25 years of experience shares that they ask people why they chose their agency, and it is often because of their social media presence. He describes:

> ❝ **Our prospective candidates are really engaged with social media. Everyone's got a phone, and that's how they send and receive messages and we have researched this, we have kept track of this, we keep the analytics on this, and we found that when we, pull our prospective candidates, and certainly up to being hired, we ask, 'How'd you hear about us? And why did you choose [our city]?' And it starts with social media. They track our website; they track all of our social media handles.** ❞

Different Perceptions of Shift Work

Participants discussed that newer generations are interested in jobs that are more flexible. Law enforcement and fire service employees, traditionally, have worked a considerable amount of overtime hours, but there is a general perception that many new workers want flexibility in their schedules for a better work-life balance. Unfortunately, many agencies have had to mandate overtime in recent years because of workforce recruitment and retention issues, which participants felt has further hurt retention.

Shift work was a large challenge raised by fire service and law enforcement participants. A female fire service participant describes, "I think part of it is the work-life balance issue, and some folks saying, 'You know I don't want to be gone from my family for 48 hours or 24 hours of time.'" Some leaders shared that the shift work was OK with some younger workers but became more difficult as they had children, got married, or had other life responsibilities.

A 43-year-old male police participant in a rural area with 23 years of experience discusses how shift work can be a barrier to recruitment:

> ❝ **It's difficult to get them to want to be a police officer because you work nights, weekends, holidays even, you miss family events. And trying to come up with a way to attract that generation, and the younger generation, is becoming more difficult because you have to make a non-traditional profession as far as work, work environment, work schedules, and all that adapt to a generation that wants that time with their family, wants those days off, wants to know the why, why they have to go block a road for four hours, or whatever.** ❞

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF ARIZONA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT AND FIRE SERVICE PERSONNEL   19

A 64-year-old male police participant in an urban area with 43 years of experience discusses that the younger generation does not volunteer to work overtime, so much so that mandatory overtime is happening, stating:

> **It amazes me still that this younger generation does not like to volunteer to work overtime. They're finding that in the fire department because I do have the fire firefighters as well, and they're running into the same thing where they're having to have mandatory overtime. 'You're on the list, and whether you want to or not, you have to come in.' We're planning our Fourth of July event for the city, and I mean, I just checked today, and we're short, like four officers. In my time, you would fight to volunteer because you wanted to make that extra money. But they want to make more money, but they want to work less.**

The differences in the perceptions of work and the desire for overtime was difficult for the officer to understand and led to tension among some older and younger workers. For example, a 44-year-old male fire service participant in an urban area with 20 years of experience discussed that some fire service leaders have not been receptive to learn more about the needs of younger workers, which have led some to leave. He indicated, "We had one firefighter leave just because he didn't get along with the senior members because all they did was bark orders all day long, and he never felt gratified because all he was doing was rolling a hose."

In terms of solutions, a 50-year-old male fire service participant in an urban area with 30 years of experience contends:

> **My job as a recruitment person… we need to kinda change our tactics. Because, traditionally, it's like, 'We fight fires and we have exciting work, and we only work 10 days a month, and you can make more money if you want to.' Where now it's, like, how to relate with what we're doing to what attracts them and kind of shifting the things that we highlight. Basically, you know, change with our workforce that is coming in.**

A 52-year-old fire service participant with 27 years of experience in an urban area discussed the differences in younger generations in terms of loyalty to the organization. She understands some of the skepticism of newer workers and argues that there are ways to empower new workers:

> **So, it's different. So, you gotta be willing to say, when you take this job, let's instead of ridiculing this person. Let's coach them up. Let's teach them. But these kids are super talented. They learn wicked fast. We just have to give them that opportunity and understand that we need to show them a level of respect and consideration, so that we can gain theirs, we didn't have to do that in the past. That's up to us, in my opinion. We have to coach them up and treat them differently.**

Policy Review Analysis & Results

Recruitment and retention of public safety personnel has been a growing problem for agencies of all sizes for the past quarter century. A range of white papers, policy documents, and journalistic efforts have documented the challenges public safety agencies report in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. These conversations often include discussions about the declining number of applicants agencies receive when they post position announcements, the perceived reduction (in the aggregate) in the quality of applicant pools from which new personnel are selected, and the difficulties that organizations are experiencing in retaining personnel, particularly during the initial years of a new employee's career.

Agencies and leaders continue to report struggling to achieve full staffing and retain personnel across an entire career. Similarly, leaders convey a need to be more confident about how to alleviate these problems and what changes they should implement to improve their ability to attract a sufficient pool of qualified applicants and retain those employees for long periods. Many leaders struggle to understand the realistic strategies they should implement within their own organization's context and resources while helping achieve greater success in hiring and retention.

A team of faculty and graduate students from ASU reviewed the available literature on recruitment and retention among law enforcement and fire service personnel, focusing on materials published in academic journals and reports issued by professional associations (e.g., the American Correctional Association, International City/County Management Association, International Association of Police Chiefs, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Volunteer Fire Council, etc.) and government agencies (e.g., the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority, Minnesota State Fire Department Association, U.S. Government Accountability Office, etc.)

One of the greatest challenges to public safety leaders is the need for strong research evidence that clearly indicates the strategies they should be using to recruit and retain quality personnel. The overwhelming majority of what has been written about recruitment and retention is anecdotal, not evidence-based. As a result, leaders are left with a set of recommended common practices that are not validated by data or other research evidence.

Too much of what has been written about recruitment and retention is focused primarily on the former, with much less attention on the latter. The academic retention literature does attempt to capture the career experiences of various subgroups of personnel (particularly women and employees of color.) Other literature explores the connection between workplace dynamics, employee well-being, and thoughts about resigning from an organization (often referred to as "turnover intention.") However, those experiences and thoughts do not necessarily result in resignations or other retention challenges.

Literature on recruitment and retention has tended to focus on large agencies or mid-sized and small agencies positioned in larger urban centers. As a result, very little is written about the recruitment and retention experiences and challenges of agencies serving more rural areas. It is unknown whether the common practices found in the available literature also describe the experiences and common practices relevant to rural areas and small towns.

Common Practices

The team reviewed over 75 academic articles, policy papers, reports, government documents, and key media articles that explored aspects of the recruitment and retention challenges and strategies within contemporary public safety agencies, with an emphasis on materials published in the last five years. The report includes an overview of each of the findings and a set of suggestions for appropriate levels of implementation.

This summary of the literature is divided into literature focused first on law enforcement and then on fire services; however, that there is substantial overlap in findings for these two service areas. From this review, the research team identified five key common practices law enforcement and fire service organizations should consider in order to improve recruitment and retention efforts. Not all of these common practices will be feasible or relevant in all jurisdictions. However, the research team has determined that these are the most promising approaches organizations and leaders should consider despite the absence of a strong empirical evidence base demonstrating their effectiveness.

Recruitment

Pay & Benefits

Agencies should offer a competitive pay and benefits package which may include signing bonuses, housing assistance, and longevity bonuses. There is some risk that pay and benefits considerations create a competitive situation that escalates as agencies seek to outbid proximate peers to hire the best available personnel. Such escalation may disadvantage organizations with fewer financial resources and create salary compression between newly hired personnel and experienced workforce members.

Department-Level Implementation

Leadership can partner with external agencies to develop a survey to gauge employee satisfaction with current compensation and benefits packages, as well as solicit interest in the expansion of compensation and benefits packages.[ii] Results will allow department actors to: identify benchmarks, understand employee expectations, assess various employee needs, and provide data to advocate on behalf of department employees to key decision-makers.

Local Government-Level Implementation

The City or County Manager's Office can coordinate negotiations between Human Resources and public safety departments. The departments' employee survey results could provide a substantial foundation for these discussions. Alternatively, a committee might be created to include stakeholders outside of local government (labor unions, for example) to facilitate similar conversations with the local government.

State-Level Implementation

State legislators or the Governor can introduce a program to allocate funds that may only be devoted to increasing employee wages and benefits. Some states have considered monetizing public land trusts (leasing public land to install a solar farm, for example) as a potential source of this state revenue. This option would not place the burden of funding on local governments or individual agencies, which may increase political feasibility.

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ii Smaller or rural agencies may have a hard time partnering with external agencies, but this could be an opportunity to partner with local universities or community colleges. This is a potential area of future collaboration through the ABOR TRIF program.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Law enforcement employment, in general, pays officers reasonably well in relation to minimum education standards; however, questions remain about pay rates concerning the risks, dangers, and stressors of law enforcement work, particularly in an era when officers are feeling high levels of public scrutiny.[5] In addition, while pay rates overall might be favorable, rural agencies and jurisdictions with more limited financial resources can struggle to keep pace with rising pay scales within a region. Some communities are making use of signing bonuses for newly hired officers. Other agencies are targeting bonuses for employees new to policing, such as a California agency offering a signing bonus of $75,000 to new hires who commit to five years of service with the agency.[6] Other communities are seeking to use signing bonuses to attract experienced officers from other states. In the spring of 2023, Florida offered $5,000 signing bonuses to officers who relocated from other states.[7]

The San Diego Police Department offered retired officers a 5% pay increase over two years upon return.[8] The Los Angeles Police Department also indicated its intention to rehire retired police officers. Those re-enlisted would receive their former salary, in addition to receiving their pension. However, other benefits such as health care, paid time off, disability, and/or retirement packages would not be made available to them.[9] While signing bonuses and similar incentive structures have received appreciable attention in recent news media accounts of police hiring, it is not yet clear whether these efforts appreciably help agencies address staffing shortages, whether they attract the right types of officers to an agency, or whether they are effective uses of an agency's finite financial resources.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

Low pay is a commonly cited barrier to recruitment to professional fire services.[10] Many firefighting professionals feel that their pay does not reflect the danger and physical exertion they face in their work.[11] This pattern was exemplified in the City of Alexandria, Louisiana, where a study found that local firefighters were paid 15.6% under the market rate.[12] This trend extended to other positions as well. Fire equipment operators and fire captains earned 5.1% and 4.5% below the actual average salary, respectively.[13]

This under-compensation affects recruitment levels. For example, fire service officials report that many potential candidates opt to enter other industries where they can earn higher compensation for safer work.[14] These findings indicate that adequate compensation is a crucial consideration for recruiting local firefighters. Government agencies looking to fill vacancies should ensure their pay is at market rate and representative of the work conditions.

Representation and Diversification

Potential recruits want to see themselves represented in the agencies they join. Showing inclusive workplaces is vital for recruitment. Public safety organizations have traditionally struggled to recruit women and employees of color. These groups represent a potentially important recruitment pool if organizations can find ways to encourage members to see public safety careers as meaningful and attractive opportunities.

Department-Level Implementation

Properly designed employee satisfaction surveys are an effective tool to establish an understanding of the existing work culture and identify ways to improve the environment. Where the survey tool indicated in the previous section focuses on financial well-being, this instrument would focus on other aspects, such

as a sense of belonging. Directors should coordinate with research agencies or universities to curate a survey specific to the departments that responds to their unique environments, strengths, and challenges. Simultaneously, hiring managers can benefit from inclusivity training specific to hiring practices that would help them develop a deeper awareness when attracting and assessing candidates for employment. For success, recruiters should understand that organizational diversity is more than the numbers. Rather, it is about creating equitable and inclusive paths to obtaining the credentials and experience necessary to demonstrate competency.

Local Government-Level Implementation

The City or County Manager's Office or Human Resources Department may establish policies and procedures to support the departments' inclusive hiring practices. One potential method would be to have Human Resources develop a mandated preliminary inclusiveness training course with recurring follow-up sessions. The literature highlights that success in this goal is tied to employee engagement during these sessions. Department surveys that include an employee engagement section will provide guidance to design training effectively.

State-Level Implementation

Another way to contribute to inclusivity initiatives in public safety agencies is to create resources that support inclusivity training for all government employees. Inclusivity topics are reflective of the needs and challenges of constituents. Public safety officials can provide an elevated level of service when they are made aware of (and embrace) diversity, equity, and inclusivity considerations. Anti-DEI legislation and efforts to curb the use of state resources for inclusivity efforts may hinder recruitment and retention efforts in public safety agencies.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Law enforcement has historically been viewed as a job for men, and women remain heavily under-represented, accounting only for around 14% of US police officers. In addition, in the vast majority of agencies, there is decreasing gender representation at each rising level of the organizational hierarchy, with women representing around 3% of police chiefs and sheriffs. The recruitment and marketing materials used by law enforcement agencies tend to be oriented towards a male audience. The emphasis in such materials on tactical imagery and the physical and law enforcement aspects of police work has been found ineffective in recruiting women. The marketing of policing as a profession tends to emphasize physical capacity over communication skills, which can further dissuade women from seeing policing as a viable career.[15]

Establishing more representative and inclusive law enforcement agencies has been a major focus of discourse around law enforcement in the last decade. Demographic disparities between police agencies and their communities are suspected to dissuade potential recruits from applying.[16] In general, agencies with established success in achieving staffing diversity tend to excel at subsequent hiring diversity.[17] Common recommendations regarding improving diversity in police hiring include establishing a more robust recruiting campaign with educational institutions that serve minority populations such as Hispanic-serving institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and colleges with exclusively female students. In response to these actions, departments have experienced nearly twice as many women and minorities in academy classes than before implementation.[18] There is a strong need for greater research and experimentation to assist agencies in identifying marketing, recruitment, and training practices that will enable greater success in attracting and retaining more diverse workforces.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

Critical aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion impact recruitment and retention within the fire service. This includes the multifaceted challenges fire departments face, particularly in the context of shifting societal trends, generational preferences, and the evolving landscape of workforce dynamics. Much of this literature focuses on exploring strategies and insights to enhance diversity, attract recruits, and retain personnel in a rapidly changing environment.

DEI is experienced through a series of targeted actions and approaches that address complex challenges. The emphasis on building a culture of inclusion within departments aligns with broader local government efforts to create inclusive and equitable workplaces.[19] Additionally, the discussions on recruitment challenges underscore the need for a reimagined approach that aligns with the preferences and priorities of incoming generations.[20] Cultivating a positive organizational culture, tailored training methods, and effective leadership all contribute to local government efforts to attract and retain personnel in their fire departments.

Local governments can harness inclusive strategies and their potential to address the pressing issues of workforce recruitment and retention. By incorporating diversity and inclusion strategies, fire departments can create a workforce that better represents the communities they serve, fostering trust and improved community relations.[21] The insights into recruitment strategies, especially when tailored to meet the preferences of younger recruits, enable local governments to refine their recruitment processes. By understanding younger generations' unique values and expectations, fire departments can tailor their offerings to attract the right talent and reduce turnover. These efforts ultimately contribute to a more skilled, diverse, and engaged fire service workforce, enhancing the safety and well-being of local communities.

While the theme of diversity, recruitment, and retention in the fire service offers promising solutions, challenges, and potential negative outcomes also emerge. Implementing DEI strategies and catering to generational preferences might encounter resistance from traditional practices or personnel, necessitating careful communication and change management.[22] Additionally, the need to simultaneously cater to different generations and preferences could create tensions within departments if not handled sensitively. Furthermore, adapting to evolving workforce dynamics might require significant investment in training and resources, potentially straining department budgets. Local governments need to navigate these challenges while pursuing a balanced approach that fosters diversity, attracts recruits, and retains personnel.[23]

Community Outreach and Innovative Recruitment Strategies

Organizations should use innovative strategies to connect with applicants, providing a sense of what it is like to live and work in the community. Organizations must work to make recruitment practices and onboarding procedures transparent. Traditionally, public safety organizations had to do little to secure deep pools of qualified applicants. Consequently, agencies have historically given little consideration to making the hiring process more supportive and applicant friendly. Today, organizations must rethink how they engage with applicants and support them during selection while seeking ways to streamline those processes.

Department-Level Implementation

To address awareness challenges, public engagement and education events could be coordinated by assistant directors and performed by staff at all levels of the organization. Some events can be as informal as coffee at a local café, while others can be more official (i.e., physical training day at the local academy for

interested residents). Youth camps and clubs hosted by staff can generate interest for future candidates while preparing them for the expectations of public safety staff.

Local Government-Level Implementation

Local government departments that prioritize community engagement and resident programs may also include public safety departments' events in larger local government initiatives. An example might be reserving booths for the departments when hosting job fair events. Any social events held by the local government could also incorporate public education and engagement initiatives by departments. Providing land and development for youth camps to inspire a future generation of recruits is a way Parks and Recreation departments could support these public safety departments' public outreach programs.

State-Level Implementation

State-owned land for youth camps is a potential means of supporting public safety recruitment by the Arizona State Parks Board. Similar outreach programs hosted by state public safety agencies in a centralized location or on a limited tour around the state could generate interest in public safety organizations for residents. Providing financial support to these outreach campaigns is one way for state legislators to contribute directly.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Law enforcement agencies are increasingly encouraged to expand their outreach efforts to assist in recruitment. This includes general outreach efforts to expand applicant pools and increase diversity. It also includes specific outreach efforts intended to develop stronger connections with applicants advancing further into the hiring process.

General outreach efforts should include innovations that seek to connect law enforcement with populations traditionally underrepresented in law enforcement employment, particularly youth and young adults who are most likely to be considering their future career aspirations. Youth programs can effectively increase awareness of law enforcement professions and may ultimately increase and diversify applicant pools. Explorer and cadet programs, youth camps, and law enforcement involvement in school-based education programs have all been recommended, although research validation of their success is scant.[24] Previously mentioned outreach efforts into schools, colleges, and universities that serve underrepresented populations have also been recommended, but research evidence here remains absent as well. Beyond diversity efforts, agencies have been encouraged to think innovatively about outreach and recruitment efforts that target those already working in jobs that might demonstrate an ability to multitask under pressure, such as Starbucks baristas and bartenders.[25]

As agencies begin to engage with specific potential or actual candidates for employment, developing more "high touch" engagement and outreach efforts may assist the recruitment process. Historically, law enforcement recruitment and selection processes have not prioritized the applicant's needs, wants, and experiences; instead, they have emphasized efficient and convenient processes for the hiring agency, which can leave applicants feeling neglected, uncertain, and unwanted. Agencies have begun efforts to increase their engagement with prospective and in-progress applicants, such as providing job shadowing opportunities to college students or establishing programs that allow potential applicants to work out with law enforcement personnel in preparation for physical standards testing.[26] It has also been recommended that once an applicant has passed a certain point in the selection process, they should be connected with an officer who can provide mentorship and encouragement, answer questions, provide ride-along opportunities, and otherwise work to help recruit that applicant to accept an employment offer with the agency, if one is made.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

The innovative strategies theme centers exploring innovative strategies to address the challenges of firefighter and EMS recruitment. These articles and resources delve into the evolving landscape of recruitment efforts for both traditional fire departments and volunteer-based emergency services. The overarching goal is to attract a diverse and qualified pool of candidates, ensure effective retention, and adapt to changing societal and technological trends.

In practice, these innovative strategies manifest as multifaceted approaches encompassing both private-sector principles and community engagement. For instance, leveraging social media platforms for broader outreach, which aligns with the ever-growing digital landscape, and eliminating traditional on-site exams and incorporating video interviews cater to contemporary communication preferences and offer candidates a more inclusive entry point.[27] Local governments can further support these efforts by collaborating with fire departments to allocate resources for social media campaigns, updating recruitment websites, and facilitating digital skills training for candidates.[28]

Innovative recruitment strategies' contribution to local government lies in their potential to revitalize and enhance recruitment and retention efforts. By embracing innovative techniques, fire departments can tap into previously untapped talent pools and engage candidates who might have been discouraged by traditional approaches.[29] This inclusivity fosters a more diverse workforce that better reflects the communities they serve. Furthermore, adopting private-sector practices introduces efficiency and adaptability, helping fire departments navigate budget constraints and streamline the recruitment process. Ultimately, these approaches bolster the ranks of firefighters and EMS personnel, ensuring quicker emergency response times and a stronger safety net for the local community.

While the innovative strategies present promising avenues for recruitment and retention, challenges and negative outcomes are also evident. Potential challenges may include: the digital divide in some areas, where certain demographics with limited access to technology might be excluded from these approaches; and resistance to change from within established fire departments, as adapting to new practices requires shifts in organizational culture and training. Moreover, the emphasis on private-sector principles might inadvertently introduce competition-driven dynamics that could clash with the altruistic nature of public service. It is crucial for local governments to carefully navigate these potential downsides while implementing innovative strategies to ensure that the essential values of firefighting and EMS are preserved and upheld.[30]

Branding

While public safety organizations have not historically considered how applicants perceive them, branding is now quite important to those entering the labor force. Agencies need to carefully consider how they are branding their work, their culture, and the community they serve, as these matters are of growing importance to young adults seeking to determine their career objectives.

Department-Level Implementation

To establish a brand, the literature advises identifying a core set of values and mission. Including the entire department staff in creating these values and missions is crucial to instill ownership and agreement among staff. Moreover, collaboration with all levels of the organization during this step allows employees to relate to the values they helped develop. Once values and mission are finalized, a director may create a position

for social media and branding coordinator position (if the agency does not already have a coordinator.) The coordinator would be responsible for creating content that aligns with the organization's values and mission. Community engagement and education programs should reinforce this narrative and provide alternative methods to establish the organization's brand.

Local Government-Level Implementation

Department branding can be carried onto a larger platform by rotating through departments and featuring their work to supplement local government branding programs. Similar to the recommendation for community outreach, city-hosted events with the public are an opportunity to host departments and increase their brand awareness. If there is public tension between the community and public safety, a larger initiative may be introduced by city administration to bridge the gap and repair relations. This could also be used as a *re-branding* opportunity (i.e., changing current perceptions to be more positive.)

State-Level Implementation

State-level public safety organizations may start by utilizing the recommendations provided for the department-level actors.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Branding can be evident in how organizations present themselves online (websites and social media posts) and in marketing/recruitment materials (brochures, visuals, and videos intended to facilitate the hiring process). The easiest aspects of police work to convey are law enforcement tasks, such as officers in tactical gear, officers making an arrest, in vehicles operating their emergency lights, officers running or breaking down doors, and officers with their firearms drawn. While law enforcement is a central part of police work, officers spend most of their time doing other tasks. Those other tasks include leveraging communication and interpersonal skills, problem-solving, analytical thinking, and other cognitive tasks. These more normative tasks, however, are difficult to easily convey in branding materials.

This results in branding materials misrepresenting how officers spend most of their time, the skills they most frequently use on the job, and the types of attributes good police officers possess. This misbranding of police work may result in some potential employees not understanding that police work might actually be a good profession for them to consider. Research findings indicate that recent public scrutiny in traditional and social media is not necessarily dissuading prospective applicants from pursuing a career in law enforcement.[31] A strong self-motivating factor was a call to public service as a profession, which presents law enforcement agencies with the opportunity to match branding efforts to public service motivation rather than law enforcement tactics.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

Employer branding refers to the strategic approach of promoting a distinctive and appealing image of an organization as an employer, both internally and externally.[32] It proves advantageous for diverse recruitment for three primary reasons: public employer branding draws attention to job openings in the public sector, encouraging job seekers and career changers to apply for positions; it helps organizations identify the key factors that effectively attract potential recruits; and in the context of public employer branding, there is a pressing need to attract a highly qualified and diverse workforce.

In their 2021 study, Keppeler and Papenfuß examined how signals of employer branding in digital advertisements related to societal impact, job security, and performance orientation influence individuals' interest in public sector jobs.[33] The study found that women were significantly less likely than men to click on any of the example four ads.[34] The interaction of job security with age and gender did not significantly affect the control condition.[35] This study highlights the importance of social media and its power for recruitment efforts.

Another approach taken in the literature outlines the characteristics that tend to define candidates for fire service positions and the barriers that prevent these individuals from entering the fire service. For instance, Wagner et al. surveyed 41 firefighter recruits to understand the personality traits that characterize fire service position candidates.[36] The authors found that these individuals are less likely to report having Type A personalities (personalities characterized by neuroticism and a preference for order.)[37] Firefighter recruits self-reported higher levels of extraversion and diligence.[38] Curiously, recruits were not significantly more likely than the comparison group to report an appetite for risk-taking or thrill-seeking.[39]

Findings focusing on characteristics of firefighters provide critical implications for how local governments advertise their firefighting vacancies. Local governments experiencing challenges with firefighter recruitment may benefit from adapting the language in their postings to target the candidate profile described above. Specifically, language appealing to an intrinsic commitment to public service may help attract candidates. Postings should also be tailored to address qualified candidates' concerns, especially those regarding work-life balance.

Hiring Processes

Organizations should streamline the hiring process, cutting down on unnecessary steps or lags. Public safety screening and selection processes are notoriously slow, which weakens agencies' position in a fast-paced and competitive marketplace. Agencies should seek ways to bundle steps in their selection process and otherwise streamline the time it takes for a candidate to move from applying to securing an offer of employment.

Department-Level Implementation

Department directors may audit current hiring practices to identify opportunities for innovation. One example is to enhance agency communication with applicants throughout the process (including follow-ups with those who leave the process). Another example is to consolidate steps to reduce the turnaround time for hiring, explore alternative hiring paths (i.e., apprenticeships, internships, etc.).

Local Government-Level Implementation

The Human Resources department can partner with public safety departments to negotiate the requirements of prospective hires in order to streamline the hiring process and provide alternative paths or niche positions that might not require certain professional certifications or education to fulfill assigned duties.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Law enforcement hiring processes typically require many steps that may take agencies and applicants six months or more to navigate. This requires a great deal of an applicant's time and money if they need to repeatedly travel to a community to complete each step of that process. Agencies have begun to explore ways to streamline their application and selection processes, allowing candidates to complete most of the steps requiring their effort on a weekend. While the agency might need additional time to complete background

investigations and other processes, by allowing the candidate to provide all of their engagement in a short period of time, the overall process can be streamlined, and the burden on applicants can be reduced. This can keep applicants engaged with the process and committed to that agency, particularly if other hiring processes are more protracted. Other agencies have worked with colleges and universities to identify high-quality candidates, potentially through internship programs, and making early commitments to sponsor students through training academies if they complete their degree, meet all hiring qualifications, and accept employment with an agency.[40]

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

Interview and onboarding processes can be very intimidating for the recruits. If there are too many hoops to jump through, the department will lose potential recruits. Ensuring interviews and other onboarding action items are accessible to all applicants is necessary to make the interview and onboarding process as accessible as possible. The removal of an on-site written exam increases recruitment. This exam can still be administered, but online. This will allow recruits to take the exam when it is most convenient for them, which benefits those in different careers at the time of application or recruits who are relocating to a new area. The online exam can still be proctored to ensure integrity.[41]

Retention

Wellbeing

Employee well-being has historically received less attention by public safety organizations, although literature suggests this may be starting to shift. Young adults entering today's workforce are far more interested in having a workplace that prioritizes well-being and work-life balance.

Department-Level Implementation

Leadership could create a small focus group of members who represent multiple positions and identities to address lapses in well-being. The focus group could also work to draft programs and policies that would enhance employee well-being and present them to leadership for implementation. Allocating a portion of the department budget towards these initiatives, like the others, communicates to staff that leadership is prioritizing employee needs.

Local Government-Level Implementation

Local government administrators may be inclined to approve larger budgets that specifically prioritize well-being programs in public safety departments, given the nature of the work. The Human Resources department and City or County Manager's Office can also explore the feasibility of offering well-being programs as part of their benefits package. Where appropriate, opportunities for hybrid or remote work may also be considered.

State-Level Implementation

State public service agencies may benefit from the recommendations offered at the department level. Additionally, policymakers can introduce mandates for government agencies to offer public service staff an expanded benefits package and include certain activities to increase well-being.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

The policing profession has begun to recognize that organizations have an obligation to monitor and support the emotional and physical well-being of employees. While agencies have traditionally emphasized keeping officers physically safe on the job, there has historically been an unwillingness to recognize that officers might experience trauma, burnout, stress, work-family conflict, substance abuse, or suicidality. More recently, agencies have begun to consider the obligation they have for the mental and emotional well-being of employees, particularly given the high degree of trauma exposure among law enforcement officers.[42] There is a large range of recommendations, few of which are validated by research as effective practices. Nonetheless, agencies are increasingly encouraged to train officers about mental health, substance abuse, and suicidality, to train officers to recognize warning signs of those issues in peers, and to make available a range of support services. The latter can range from clinical and medical interventions, to dietary consultation, medical assessment, incentives to promote physical activity, and massage therapy.[43]

Mental health, substance use, marital strife, suicidality, and other similar concerns have traditionally been stigmatized within law enforcement culture and organizations. Officers were expected to remain inured to the trauma and violence they witnessed on the job. Seeking counseling services or medication assistance was viewed as a sign of weakness. Officers needing such measures rarely admitted they were using such intervention or assistance. Consequently, officers struggling with their mental well-being had their situation compounded by the inaccurate notion they were weaker than their peers. Destigmatizing help seeking can increase the normalization of counseling, medication, and other assistance, while reducing the chances that officers leave their profession. Providing officers mental health and other support services, destigmatizing the use of those services, and normalizing conversations about well-being, including care for co-workers, can help officers stay on the job and working in policing when they are experiencing difficult times and circumstances.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

Career burnout and mental health challenges are commonly cited as a barrier to retaining professional firefighters. Dias et al. examine the reasons for career firefighter burnout.[44] They specifically compare the role of personal factors, such as demographic characteristics, and work factors, such as workload, in producing feelings of burnout. They found personal factors were generally more responsible for burnout than work factors.[45] For instance, older firefighters were found to be more susceptible to burnout than their younger peers. A fire service professional's family responsibilities were also associated with exhaustion. The more dependent family members a career firefighter had, the more likely they were to experience burnout. Finally, higher satisfaction with standard of living was associated with a higher risk of burnout in career firefighters. The authors speculate that this is because firefighters must work harder and take on more responsibility to achieve a higher standard of living.

Poor work-life balance and mental health are considered significant factors in professional firefighter turnover.[46] Persistent exposure to traumatic and life-threatening conditions can contribute to mental illnesses in firefighters, especially post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts.[47] Furthering the issue, post-traumatic stress disorder in firefighters has been associated with an increased risk of certain physical health conditions, including cardiovascular disease.[48] In comparing perceived access to behavioral

care between career and volunteer firefighters, career firefighters reported significantly less access to a trained peer support system and follow-up care.[49] Career firefighters were more likely to report unsupportive leadership, privacy concerns, and doubt that providers would not be familiar with their work culture as barriers to pursuing behavioral care. Both volunteer and career firefighters reported stigma as a barrier to pursuing behavioral care.

These findings suggest that government agencies must consider mental health and well-being when formulating retention efforts. Firefighters should be provided with adequate support networks to cope with the stressors of their work, especially as they age.[50] Some firefighting agencies have done so by increasing mandatory rest days.[51] Leadership should establish a culture that eliminates stigmatization of behavioral care and promotes follow-up care.[52] Management should provide a framework for flagging and responding to early signs of burnout.[53] Rather than being a top-down, external determination, shifts should be, "jointly negotiated" in a way that, "offers increased agency and participation, especially for career firefighters."[54]

Retirement and Other Benefits

A strong retirement package can help anchor an employee to a workplace and improve retention. This is increasingly challenging as public safety and government personnel systems switch from defined benefit (i.e., pension) programs to defined contribution (i.e., retirement savings) systems. In many instances, agencies and leaders cannot control these decisions, as they are controlled by local or state human resources personnel, local or state executives, and elected officials. Leaders should work with the latter groups to ensure the most competitive plan possible is available to incentivize retention to employees. This is a complex discussion, since there are generational divides on how effective retirement benefits are as a recruitment or retention strategy. Generally, defined benefit retirement plans were seen as important for retention, but not necessarily helpful for recruiting younger employees.

Department-Level Implementation

Leadership should work with staff through focus groups or survey methods to determine staff preferences regarding these benefits, and can then present them to local government administrators, collective bargaining leadership such as labor unions, and state agencies for consideration.

Local Government-Level Implementation

Local government leaders should ensure that they have a long-term plan to cover their portion of retirement benefits and work with state-level leaders to craft plans that make sense for the recruitment and retention of employees at the local level.

State-Level Implementation

State lawmakers should work with local governments to determine what makes the most sense for reforms for the retirement system. While robust defined benefit plans are crucial for retention, they are not effective as recruitment tools. It may make sense to continue to increase the flexibility and options for incoming employees.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Financial incentives are typically offered as suggestions to mitigate law enforcement retention problems. Research has found that officers who feel reasonably well compensated and who feel they have few options

for alternative employment with similar pay and benefits are incentivized to stay in policing.[55] Pay and benefits, including retirement packages, may draw workers to law enforcement employment and incentivize staying in that profession. Some communities and states have created incentives that encourage retired officers to stay in policing (sometimes by shifting employment to another agency), to work past a retirement opportunity date, or to return to policing after retirement.[56] The latter can include systems that allow retired officers to return as civilian employees. Beyond pay and benefits, officers may respond favorably to being provided extra training opportunities, new equipment, new vehicles, new or remodeled work facilities, and benefits such as "take home" work vehicles.[57] While pay, benefits, and retirement incentives cost agencies and communities money, such expenses might be cheaper than screening, hiring, and training new employees to replace officers who have resigned or retired at the first opportunity.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

The literature identifies financial incentives as a critical and effective means of retaining firefighter personnel. These practices are generally designed to delay retirement and prevent pre-retirement exit from the industry. Deferred retirement option plans, or DROPs, are schemes that allow retiring firefighters to collect their pension while continuing to work.[58] DROPs have been shown to significantly improve retention of retirement-aged employees. For example, when the City of Philadelphia implemented DROPs, 90% of employees enrolled in the program.[59] The City's public safety employees worked approximately five years longer than they had prior to the program's implementation.[60]

Leadership

While employees want competitive pay and benefits, they also want to work in a healthy organization that values their well-being, provides work-life balance, and where leadership is viewed as positive, compassionate, and proactive. Leaders throughout an organization are crucial to employee retention. Positive leaders make employees feel they are safe, valued, and have someone advocating for their interests and well-being.

Department-Level Implementation

The unit leader can choose to implement a continued education requirement for staff who have subordinates. This continued education can be developed with Human Resources or with an external agency that specializes in leadership and communication. The curriculum would emphasize personal development, mentorship, and tools (i.e., conflict resolution strategies) that support managers to be effective leaders in the organization. Additionally, incorporating a recognition or awards program for good leaders by a nomination process could be effective in motivating continuity.

Local Government-Level Implementation

Human Resources may also partner with these departments to conduct workshops with supervisors to explore their personal strengths and weaknesses to help them become better leaders. Comparable to the latter recommendation for the department level, the local government can choose to integrate an organization-wide leadership recognition. This scale of recognition may further entice managers to perform above and beyond in department leadership.

State-Level Implementation

State public safety organizations may begin with the recommendations offered at the department level. State recognition of top leaders in their fields may provide another level of interest in management participation in leadership programs. The state could also provide resources for academies to implement supervisor training programs that would be accessible to all agencies.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Leaders and leadership play central roles in retaining personnel in any organization. Poor leadership can disincentivize staying on the job or reduce job satisfaction or commitment. In policing, it is also important to consider the extent to which an officer's personal ideals, philosophies on policing, and beliefs about the organization might align with peers and leaders. Misalignment can be an additional impetus for officers to consider exploring new employment opportunities. Officers' relationships with their role as law enforcement officers has been seen to play a role in job satisfaction. "Self-legitimacy" -- the confidence in one's self of their authority -- directly influences how satisfied an officer is with their employment.[61]

While leaders might not unilaterally control all of these circumstances and conditions, they can play a role in allowing unwelcoming circumstances to perpetuate or ameliorate. Leaders need to understand *why* some officers are leaving their agency, *where* those officers turn for subsequent employment, and *how* changes in workplace practices, culture, and norms can help retain personnel. While leaders themselves might not create or produce circumstances that generate incivilities or misalignment, they are in positions to recognize and work to improve those conditions.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

The role of leadership is critical in recruitment and especially retention efforts within fire departments. Buckman underscores the significance of effective leadership strategies, communication, inclusivity, and positive organizational culture in addressing the challenges of attracting and retaining members in career fire departments, but especially in volunteer fire departments.[62]

Effective leadership in fire departments functions through various mechanisms that enhance recruitment and retention processes. The multifaceted impact of leadership includes positive communication, clear recruitment mechanisms, training, and updated department websites.[63] Practical actions such as creating effective onboarding programs and fostering a culture of kindness and respect play a crucial role in member engagement and retention.[64] Additionally, the focus on inclusivity, diversity, and preventing bullying and harassment contributes to a more welcoming and supportive environment. Leadership can align with local government efforts as they incorporate these leadership principles and practices into their fire departments, fostering an atmosphere that attracts, supports, and retains dedicated members.[65]

The beneficial contribution of this theme to local government more broadly lies in its potential to foster a strong and committed workforce within fire departments. Effective leadership practices help create a positive organizational culture that attracts recruits and ensures their continued engagement and long-term commitment.[66] By implementing strategies discussed in the articles, such as clear communication, respectful treatment, and comprehensive training, local governments can create an environment where members feel valued and motivated. This, in turn, leads to improved emergency response capabilities, enhanced community safety, and a more connected and engaged local community.[67]

Leadership's impact on recruitment and retention holds significant promise, but challenges and negative outcomes are also evident. Implementing effective leadership practices may require a cultural shift within fire departments, which could be met with resistance from entrenched practices or personnel. Creating a positive organizational culture and addressing issues like bullying and harassment might take time and sustained effort, potentially slowing down immediate results.[68] Additionally, despite emphasizing leadership, external factors such as socioeconomic changes and shifting community demographics could still impact recruitment and retention efforts.[69] Local governments need to navigate these challenges while implementing leadership-focused strategies to ensure a balanced and effective approach.

Fit/Inclusive Work Environments

Employees want to feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and value. While leadership is part of this environment, fit and inclusion extend throughout the workplace and workforce. This is particularly key for employees who do not fall into groups that have historically made up the public safety workforce. If agencies seek to recruit from current, more diverse, generations, it is not enough to succeed at the point of entry. Organizations must create environments that help employees with diverse backgrounds and attributes feel included and valued.

Implementation strategies for this recommendation are the same as recommendations around inclusion for recruitment. Please refer to that section for implementation ideas.

Understand Why Turnover Is Happening

Some turnover is inevitable in any organization. Public safety organizations have often struggled to understand key reasons for turnover when it takes place. Knowing why employees are separating from an organization can help identify areas needing improvement or modification. Agencies should seek ways to collaborate with researchers or other independent entities to create a safe and confidential manner in which employees can share concerns that might have precipitated their separation from the organization.

Department-Level Implementation

Directors can create a policy to conduct exit interviews when employees leave and follow-up interviews with prospective hires who elected to leave during the hiring process. If funding permits, creating a few temporary positions in the department or even hire a third party to perform the follow-up interviews is a means to collect information without adding the burden of more work to current employees. Exit interviews can be arranged with assistant directors or another department leader who was not the direct supervisor of the person leaving (to mitigate response bias.)

Local Government-Level Implementation

At the local level, Human Resources may assume responsibility for exit interviews and share results with the public safety directors.

State-Level Implementation

Exit and follow-up interviews can also benefit state public safety agencies. The data accumulated by all agencies can be made accessible to policymakers for future analysis.

Findings from the Law Enforcement Literature

Misalignment between an officer, their organization, and the policing industry in terms of ideologies has been identified as a key factor predicting which new officers will resign before completing their second year of service. The study also concluded that gender, racial, and ethnic identities significantly influenced reasons for resignation.[70] Women tend to experience less "workgroup fit" than men when working in policing.[71] This specific sense of belonging is offset by what the research calls acts of "incivility." Traditional cultural values within law enforcement organizations were considered to create unwanted and undesirable circumstances for women in policing.[72]

Recruiting a diverse law enforcement force requires a welcoming work environment in order to *maintain* a diverse law enforcement force.[73] In the Haar study, Field Training Officers (FTOs) were found to have negatively shaped cadets' experiences, influencing their future decision to resign from police service. [74] It was advised that the selection of FTOs should be handled more meticulously in the future due to the degree of influence the role was determined to have on the decision of resignation.[75]

As noted previously, leaders need to understand turnover, who is leaving, why they are leaving, and what could have been done to prevent a resignation. In some cases, leaders might even seek to understand why more employees might be seeking retirement immediately upon becoming eligible. Leaders do not have unfettered abilities to correct all wrongs and problems in their organizations that result in resignations, but they are the actors best positioned to alleviate those situations.

Findings from the Fire Service Literature

To increase the success of retention in career and volunteer fire departments, these organizations must understand why public service employees leave their jobs. Understanding the *why* of turnover rates in other public sector organizations can be very educational for the management teams in firefighter departments. Hur and Abner studied turnover rates across a multitude of public sector departments.[76] The authors identified six predictors of turnover intention, including: demographics, work environment, job characteristics, human resource management practices, employee work attitude and motivation, and external environmental factors. The study found a positive relationship between turnover intention and job characteristics. Specifically, the job characteristics causing turnover intention included job exhaustion, role ambiguity, and role conflict. Human resource and management teams in fire service departments can learn from this and understand that addressing issues relating to job characteristics in their organization can increase retention rates. If firefighters are feeling a sense of burnout and exhaustion, they will leave the organization. One strategy these departments can prioritize is to help firefighters establish and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Potential Areas for Additional Research

The research presented in this report demonstrates several knowledge gaps where future research is needed to help organizations develop a stronger evidence base that will identify the most effective recruitment and retention strategies.

First, little is known about why employees separate from public safety workplaces. A few studies have considered this issue, and most research is several decades old. Our research team is prepared to partner with public safety agencies in Arizona to conduct independent interviews with employees who resign.

Being interviewed by an independent researcher (rather than a workplace supervisor or human resources representative) creates a safe space where employees can be open and honest about their workplace experiences. An independent study of individuals who separate from law enforcement and fire service careers would provide the most accurate and reliable understanding of why employees leave public safety employers and what organizations could do to help retain personnel. If this is not feasible, particularly for smaller agencies, it would be helpful to develop consistent exit interview questions, or perhaps an online form, that could consistently capture the perspectives of people who leave the profession.

Second, conversations around recruitment should pay more attention to the experiences and perspectives of recently hired personnel and those who applied to an organization but ceased to engage in the hiring process at some point. Our research team is prepared to partner with public safety agencies in Arizona to study the experiences and decisions made by those recently undergoing recruitment and selection processes. Knowing the experiences and views of recently hired employees can help identify what organizations are doing well. The insights derived from applicants who ceased engaging in the process can help identify improvement areas.

It is equally important to consider why there has been a decline in applications to public safety positions at all. Given our research team's position in higher education, we would be well positioned to speak to students about their perceptions of public safety careers and the types of potential barriers to applying. In addition, we could test the potential recruitment messages that are most persuasive with this population. This work could also be conducted with partners at local community colleges and high schools, as the research suggests that students often opt in or out of these types of careers at a young age.

Third, knowledge about recruitment and retention tends to overemphasize agencies' experiences in urban areas. Far less is known about the experiences, strategies, and struggles of agencies serving rural areas and smaller towns (outside urban centers.) The literature review and the interview data reinforce that much remains to be learned about agencies who operate outside of the metro regions. This is more than just a matter of academic knowledge. This situation potentially under serves and under represents the public safety needs of Arizonans living in rural areas and small towns. The research team is prepared to work on a project specifically studying public safety organizations' recruitment and retention needs, challenges, and successes in rural areas and small towns.

Finally, the research team suggests further research into the development and funding of law enforcement and fire academies by exploring how other, similarly situated states structure their academy processes. As noted, there is a need for additional academies in the state, particularly for rural areas. It would also consider recommendations for the state and local governments for how we might restructure and fund our academy processes. For example, some states have experimented with online learning for portions of the academy, which may help serve the needs of rural communities. Some states integrate academies into community colleges or university systems, having POST focus on certification and discipline. There are a number of models that Arizona might consider as options to increase academy capacity and support for rural areas.

Appendix 1: Interview Methodology

Data and Recruitment

The data for this study was collected using semi-structured interviews with 64 participants in leadership positions across Arizona working in law enforcement, fire service, and local government agencies. Participants were recruited through contacts provided by law enforcement, fire service, and local government leadership organizations, including the Arizona County Supervisors Association, the Arizona Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Arizona Sheriffs Association. We centered our outreach to leaders of organizations that had knowledge of current recruitment and retention procedures. All interviews were completed between June 2023 and August 2023. The research protocol was approved by ASU's Institutional Review Board. The research team emailed potential participants to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study and to set up an interview time. Interviews were conducted via Zoom web-based conferencing software and recorded with permission from the participants. We reviewed the consent information and obtained a verbal "Yes" from each participant before beginning the interviews. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, on average. The research team created a semi-structured interview protocol broadly designed to consider opportunities and challenges related to employee recruitment and retention. Participants were asked a series of questions, including the effect of policy changes and recent events, like COVID, and the role of pay and benefits on recruitment and retention. In addition, participants were also asked what they felt would help their organization with retention and recruitment, if they felt their compensation was competitive for their field, and if retirement packages were important to their employees. Audio and transcription files were downloaded from Zoom's secure servers, and the research team cleaned and prepared the transcripts for analysis by cross-checking them with the audio. No names or places were used in the report to protect participant confidentiality.

As displayed in Table 1, participants worked in local government (20%, n = 13), law enforcement (53.8%, n = 35), and fire organizations (26.2%, n = 17). More than three-quarters of the sample were men (76.9%, n = 50), with the rest of individuals identifying as women (21.6%, n = 14) and one individual unknown (1.5%, n=1). In comparison, Arizona's population is 50% women. The majority of participants identified racially as Caucasian or white (81.6%, n = 53), while the rest identified African-American or Black (3.1%, n = 2), Native American (1.5%, n = 1), and Greek (1.5%, n=1). Of these participants, some also identified themselves ethnically as Hispanic (9.2%, n = 6). Six individuals did not disclose their race or ethnicity (9.2%). In comparison, Arizona's population identifies as white (81.9%), Hispanic (32.5%), Black (5.5%), and American Indian (5.2%). Most of the participants were from urban areas (83.1%, n = 54), while the rest were from rural areas classified as communities with less than 5,000 residents (9.2%, n = 6). Other participants were from statewide agencies or groups (6.2%, n = 4) or organizations representing a large regional area (1.5%, n = 1). Arizona's statewide makeup is comparable, with 89.3% of its area being categorized as urban and 10.7% categorized as rural.

Table 1. Demographic Information.

Description	n (%)
Professions	
Law Enforcement	35 (53.8)
Fire Service	17 (26.2)
Local Government	13 (20.0)

Gender	
Men	50 (76.9)
Women	14 (21.6)
Unknown	1 (1.5)
Race	
Caucasian/White	53 (81.6)
African American/Black	2 (3.1)
Native American	1 (1.5)
Greek	1 (1.5)
Unknown	6 (9.2)
Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic	59 (90.8)
Hispanic	6 (9.2)
Community Classification	
Urban	54 (83.1)
Rural	6 (9.2)
Statewide/Groups	4 (6.2)
Regional	1 (1.5)

Participants ranged in years of experience from 4 months of experience to 48 years of experience, with the average experience being 23.8 years. Participants were asked to self-identify their age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Participants ranged in age from 31 years old to 64 years old, with the average age being 48 years. In comparison, the population of Arizona has 54.2% of its population between the ages of 18 and 64 years.

Table 2. Age and Experience

Description	Low	High	Average
Age	31 years old	64 years old	48 years old
Experience	4 months	48 years	23.8 years

Data Analysis Strategy

Researchers met and developed an initial coding scheme reflecting possible codes derived from the interview guide and codes that emerged during data collection. The data were coded using a modified grounded theory approach, which Deterding and Waters identify as "flexible coding" in which the research team inductively and deductively coded the data to identify themes that emerged from the data.[77] Six major themes emerged from the data, including the academy, housing and infrastructure, health and well-being, generational differences, retirement and benefits, and hiring and retention processes. The initial codebook developed by the research team was centered around the interview questions. As the team members coded the data, other themes emerged that were included in the analysis. Upon completing coding, we individually built analytic memos related to each data set on key topics of the study. Memos were used to draft the final results of the study.

Appendix 2: Public Service Agency Leadership Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview consent: *Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. Before we get started, let's take a few minutes to review the consent forms. I know you have had some time to read through these. Now is the time to ask questions and clarify any information that wasn't clear when you read through it. [leave time to discuss the consent and answer questions]*

We'll be spending approximately 45 minutes talking together today. I have several broad questions and probably some additional clarifying questions to get things started, but I hope this feels more like a conversation. There are no right and wrong answers. We simply want to understand your perception and experiences. Your perceptions are really important to this process. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.

I'm going to start the audio recording now. [Note the date when audio starts]

We would like to begin with brief introductions. Since we want to keep everything you say anonymous within any final reports, we ask that you introduce yourself and share:

Questions: *Your experience and insight are important, we want to begin the discussion by learning a bit more about you.*

1. Tell me a little bit about your current position and organization. How long have you been working in this capacity? How did you come to work for your organization? What attracted you to this line of work?

2. Have you worked for any other agencies/organizations prior to your current organization that focus on public safety? If so, can you tell me a little bit about that organization and your role?

RECRUITMENT – *We are centering our work primarily into line positions, but please denote any challenges to recruitment to supervisory/management positions, if appropriate.*

1. **Can you describe (if any) the general recruitment plan for your organization?**
   a. How have (have you) seen recruitment efforts change over the course of your career?
   b. Are there active discussions around improving recruitment in your organization? If so, describe.
   c. Can you describe your general staffing level at this time
      • Probe: understaffed, missing certain positions, etc.
   d. What are the biggest barriers you perceive for recruitment?
   e. Have there been recent events or policy changes that have influenced recruitment?
      • Probe: **POLICE** Did COVID influence recruitment? Did the killing of George Floyd (and other Black persons) and associated civil unrest influence recruitment?
      • Probe: **FIRE** Have changes in climate or recent forest fires influenced recruitment?
   f. Does your staffing generally reflect the makeup of the community you serve, or are some groups over or under-represented?
      • Probe: race, gender, ethnicity, age?

RETENTION – *We now want to consider the efforts your organization has taken to prevent or reduce employee turnover in the short and long term.*

1. **Can you describe (if any) retention efforts your organization has undertaken?**

    a. How have the retention plans changed over the course of your career?

    b. Are there active discussions around changing/improving retention?
       - Probe: Can you give some examples?

    c. Do you have any data on retention?
       - Probe: Do you conduct exit interviews? If you collect data, how is it used?

    d. Are there groups of individuals that you find it more difficult to retain?
       - Probe: Front-line vs. managerial positions?

    e. In terms of those leaving your organization, have you noticed whether there are any patterns in terms of who is leaving relative to their demographic background?

    f. Have there been recent events or policy changes that have influenced retention?
       - Probe: Did COVID influence retention? Did the killing of George Floyd (and other Black persons) and associated civil unrest influence retention?
       - Probe: Fire events

    g. Can you describe the culture around work/life balance in your organization?

    h. Does the organization provide services to address the stress of the work?
       - Probe: Are there other wellness or other services that your organization provides?
       - Probe: What additional services are needed?

We want to wrap up with some general questions about retention and recruitment.

1. **What information or resources would help you be more successful in recruiting and retaining personnel?**

2. **Have you observed changes in the expectations, values, and attitudes of (prospective) employees as it relates to recruitment and retention?**
   - Probe: What has changed? What are your thoughts about those changes?

3. **What has changed in fire/police that represents favorable shifts in how the profession seeks to recruit and retain employees?**
   - Probe: Can you describe some positive changes in how (prospective) employees are treated?

4. **Do you feel that job salaries and benefits are competitive in your market?**
   - Probe: Are there specific jobs that are better compensated than others?

5. **Do retirement packages influence recruitment and retention?**
   - Probe: Are retirement packages more important for recruitment and retention for different groups of workers (older vs. younger).

RECRUITMENT PREDICTION TASK – Before we conclude, we would like to show you a few postcards designed for a recruitment campaign. These are based on our expectations about what might make people apply to public safety jobs, but we don't know, so there's no right or wrong answer.

[Show postcards]

We would like to get your instinctive reactions to these: If you had to rank them in terms of how effective you think each would be at generating applications, how would you rank them? Imagine, we send these out to 10,000 households in your community area, how many applications do you think each would generate?

Are there any questions I should have asked you that I didn't? Or is there anything else you want to share?

Is there anyone else that you think we should contact?

Everyone - Background

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

> For example, how old are you?

> Are you married? Do you have any children?

> How do you identify in terms of race/ethnicity and gender?

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