

Employing Returning Combat Veterans as Law Enforcement Officers Recruitment Strategies

Current outreach strategies and marketing techniques for recruiting combat veterans



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Strategies for Recruiting Combat Veterans

I. Overview

The Employing Returning Combat Veterans as Law Enforcement Officers project team has assessed current outreach strategies and marketing techniques that law enforcement agencies use to market, recruit, and employ returning combat veterans. While some departments are successful in reaching out to combat veterans, others have not taken full advantage of modern marketing and recruiting tools, and have had limited success in recruiting servicemembers who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. This document provides relevant background information and summarizes some particularly outstanding policies, recommendations, and recruitment strategies currently offered by law enforcement agencies, that, if adopted by others, will create a positive environment for recruiting and hiring returning combat veterans. All of these strategies are designed to reach out to our country's patriotic combat veterans and provide them with the opportunity to serve their community through a career in law enforcement.

II. Methodology

Questionnaires and a request for recruiting materials were sent to a sample of 45 law enforcement agencies across the United States in an effort to identify best practices, standing orders, and challenges to recruiting combat veterans. In all, 30 agencies contributed information to the research. Several excellent strategies and programs were identified, while also noting several areas of improvement and impediments to creating a successful strategy of welcoming veterans into the law enforcement profession. We also viewed many local, state, and federal law enforcement agency websites in order to identify websites that employ innovative ideas to welcome and target veterans. Additionally, we have attended a number of law enforcement job fairs in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area to determine which law enforcement agencies are recruiting, who is utilized in the recruiting effort, and the types of materials displayed that might appeal to veterans.

III. Strategies

A. Agency Website

Discussion: The face or identity of an organization is often represented through their website. Veterans will search a website for job postings, job descriptions, and information about incentives and support provided to veterans. Many agencies simply provide basic information about the application process but fail to include any text that focuses on veterans or their families.

Strategies:

- Consider adding a separate webpage or section which will appeal to veterans interested in law enforcement. Utilize marketing materials that will target military organizations in the Reserve components and those which indicate an

understanding of key veteran issues such as the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and Veteran Affairs (VA).

- Provide a direct link to IACP's *Discover Policing* which provides veteran policing opportunities. (<http://www.discoverpolicing.org>).
- Establish an e-mail link so an agency officer with military experience can respond to questions from interested veterans.
- Populate a FAQ section which provides answers to questions involving the application process, skills desired, education and/or GI Bill credits, agency vet 2 vet programs, and veteran incentives.
- Display pictures of sworn officer veterans and indicate their Service affiliation.

B. **Attending Military Reception Events/Ceremonies**

Discussion: Law enforcement organizations pass up recruiting opportunities by not attending local military pre and post deployment activities. Despite few or no vacancies in a department, your agency could still reach out to interested veterans, allowing them to take an examination, and be placed on a waiting list.

Strategies:

- Establish a presence at events such as airports, demobilization ceremonies, and homecoming celebrations that will highlight department support for units, individuals, and their families.
- Prepare marketing materials such as posters, pamphlets, and brochures that showcase your agency.
- If applicable, prepare a "white paper" or fact sheet which highlights individual contributions of nearby units which have "citizen servicemembers" on their active rosters.

C. **Building Partnerships with Military Facilities/Organizations**

Discussion: A law enforcement organization will enhance visibility with veterans by establishing a partnership or an affiliation with a local military base, Reserve center or Guard armory. In "military" towns or jurisdictions, this affiliation has existed for some time and should continue with involvement by a staff officer who has some military experience. The relationship should go beyond merely an opportunity to recruit veterans, but could for example, offer crime prevention strategies, ride-along programs, and physical security surveys to family members. In some cases, departments can partner with specific units that are earmarked for an overseas deployment with a police support mission.

Strategies:

- Develop a relationship with a military base's transition office or career center. Services identify them differently, but they may be called the Navy Fleet and Family Support Center, the Army Community Service Center, the Marine Corps

Community Services, the USAF Airman & Family Readiness Center, a US Coast Guard's Personnel Service Center, or a transition assistance office (generic).

- Develop a departmental display or "fact sheet" that provides marketing material for your agency and provide it to venues accessible to military personnel, both on and off base.
- Consider having a department recruiter available to respond to inquiries from interested veterans.
- Volunteer to support presentations focused on transitioning military police or security force personnel.
- Partner with a base provost marshal or police chief to support them when feasible and permitted by law, and assist with information about future job openings.
- Identify the state Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) point of contact. Inquire about signing a "Statement of Support."
- Post employment information on a college or technical school campus where potential applicants may be working toward a degree in police science or criminal justice.
- Offer to teach servicemembers subjects such as interrogation, investigative techniques, patrol, evidence collection, preservation, and handling.

D. Educate Department/Recruiters

Discussion: Returning combat veterans are provided information on many programs and services available to them during demobilization; these programs include health care, benefits, reemployment, and social services designed to ease the transition from deployment. The laws, provisions, and programs that supported servicemembers several years ago may be different from those in place today. As such, each department's management team needs to be familiar with basic laws and benefits available to veterans as well as medical issues that could affect employment and reemployment. This understanding will go a long way to reducing stress and anxiety among returning veterans and their families.

Strategies:

- Conduct a training class and ensure department managers are familiar with the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), and how Guard/Reserve members are protected with reinstatement in the position they would have likely achieved had they remained continuously employed (escalator position).
- Ensure the department is familiar with the types of rehabilitation and outreach services provided by the military, so the department may incorporate selected services within their policies and procedures when permitted by local statute or law

- Invite a health care professional to a training session to educate the department's management team on health concerns (e.g., Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)) in addition to programs offered by local military health care facilities and Veteran Affairs (VA) medical center facilities
- Circulate the IACP guidebooks supporting law enforcement leaders and returning combat veterans which explain veteran programs in detail. These guides are available at <http://www.theiacp.org/vets2cops>.
- Reinforce with all current and future veteran applicants that the department is familiar with, understands, and supports Guard and Reserve obligations under the United States Code (USC)

E. Incentives

Discussion: Departments have, in selected cases, gone the extra mile by providing compelling employment incentives. Departments that do not offer incentives may be losing out on recruiting highly skilled veterans because other agencies promote better incentives or offer a more comprehensive deal. While it is understood that many departments have been forced to reduce budgets, any single or combination of incentives will let the veteran know that the department is fully supportive of veterans joining their ranks.

Strategies: Departments could offer some of the following incentives to returning combat veterans to entice them to join your department (ensure that any incentives conform to your local, state, or federal statutes, if applicable):

- Ten preference points added to oral interview score
- Five preference points added to exam score
- Ten preference points added to exam score for disabled veterans
- Preference points, if not used for initial hire (i.e., high exam score), could be saved for a promotional exam
- College credit requirements could be waived or reduced (i.e., 30 college credit waiver with two years of military service)
- Military Buyback: Veteran may purchase/buyback up to four years of credit depending on length of military service
- Continued promotional process opportunities even if the veteran is deployed
- Salary made "whole" if military pay is less than law enforcement salary
- Extension of maximum applicant age
- Selective application process consideration if within six months of military separation
- Reserve Duty Pay: Up to 240 hours paid leave to attend military training per year
- Supplemental Entrance Exams: If an agency tests once every 1-2 years, hold a special exam more frequently to accommodate deployed veterans

- Military Deferment: Application eligibility for appointment extended an additional two years after deployment or expiration of exam
- Service Credits: Employee shall not incur any loss of total service if they are deployed
- GI Bill Incentives: GI Bill can pay an additional stipend (Up to \$18,000) for completing a training academy
- Preferential assignment due to specialized training and/or skill level such as dog handler, bomb squad technician, or language proficiency

F. Job Fairs

Discussion: Job or career fairs, both on and off a military base, are proven methods of reaching out to veterans who may be interested in a law enforcement career. Face-to-face exposure between an applicant and an officer with military experience can often yield positive results. A recruiter who has served in the armed forces can easily relate to veterans looking for a new career and can answer many of their questions.

Strategies:

- Develop a recruiting team among experienced officers in your agency who have served in the armed forces. If the recruiter is not a veteran, ensure the recruiter knows military terminology and understands the military transition cycle.
- Determine locations and times well in advance and reserve a booth or table for your agency. Ensure you advertise this event on local media, local campuses, the agency website, and most importantly, with military and civilian police agencies that support local military facilities. Note: The *Military Times* publishes a listing of military oriented career fairs in their quarterly publication, *Edge*.
- Consider holding an ‘expedited processing’ opportunity for veterans where you hold an information session and a civil service test, followed by an agility test the following day

G. Marketing Material/Literature

Discussion: Agency marketing materials such as brochures and pamphlets should depict the similarities between law enforcement and military culture, and the ease of transition to a career in law enforcement. These materials should be in line with the information depicted on the agency’s homepage.

Strategies:

- Create a comprehensive plan to develop and market promotional materials. The plan should allow you to:
 - Conduct a small focus group within your department using sworn and civilian veterans who have joined the department since 9/11, and discuss their experiences (pro & con) with the employment process.

- Develop a series of talking points that highlight the conclusions of the focus group and those skills servicemembers bring to the table such as self discipline, leadership, responsibility, physical fitness, and the ability to multitask
- Revise existing marketing material to reflect current career opportunities; include quotes and images that depict a department veteran in police and military uniform side-by-side, if available.

H. Media Advertising

Discussion: Most military bases, regardless of Service affiliation, distribute their own newspaper or newsletter. Consider placing an ad in these publications or within publications that are distributed at military bases throughout the United States. Additionally, each state has a state association of chiefs of police which have a variety of media tools at their disposal. The State Associations of Chiefs of Police (SACOP) is located here: (<http://www.theiacp.org/SACOP>)

Strategies:

- Contact installation public affairs officers at all installations who can be helpful in suggesting media formats, timing, and publication deadlines
- Contact your state or regional association of chiefs of police as many organizations have their own publications, newsletters, and websites
- Place advertisements in professional or online publications such as *Discover Policing* (<http://www.discoverpolicing.org>). Also, consider the following military publications:
 - Military Transition Times (<http://militarytransitiontimes.com/>)
 - Military Times (<http://www.militarytimes.com/>)
 - Navy Times (<http://www.navytimes.com/>)
 - Army Times (<http://www.armytimes.com/>)
 - Air Force Times (<http://www.airforcetimes.com/>)
 - Marine Corps Times (<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/>)
 - The Military Edge (<http://www.themilitaryedge.com/>)

I. Online Recruiting

Discussion: Online recruiting sites have become very popular among job seekers. There are several websites that cater specifically to veterans and allow posting job or employment opportunities at minimal cost.

Strategies:

- If your city or department has an information technology technician, task them with reviewing current job posting sites and identify which sites are most effective
- Survey veterans in your department to see which sites have proven useful to them and produced results

- The following sites are currently in widespread use by the Armed Forces and are user-friendly:
 - Employer Partnership of the Armed Forces (www.employerpartnership.org)
 - Marine For Life (<http://www.m4l.usmc.mil/>)
 - VetSuccess (<http://www.vetsuccess.gov/>)
 - IACP's Discover Policing website (<http://www.discoverpolicing.org/>) specifically hosts law enforcement positions and includes a section for veterans to learn about a career in law enforcement. Job postings can be added for free.
 - The Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) Program, partners U.S. Army recruiters with private organizations to assist enlisted personnel with job opportunities once enlistment has been satisfied (<https://www.armypays.com/>)

J. Recruiting Teams

Discussion: Ideally, each department/agency should have a recruiter who has the skills and knowledge to reach out to combat veterans who have a desire to pursue a law enforcement career. While large departments may have a dedicated team, smaller departments may have only one or a part-time individual who can be tasked with attending job fairs and military gatherings. Regardless, as long as they can relate to the prospective applicant, they can be successful.

Strategies:

- Assign officers who can become a department “ambassador” or recruiting specialist. The department’s management team should *carefully select* those who project a good image for the department, have military experience, and/or possess a good knowledge of the armed forces. Having a volunteer who is also a Guard or Reserve member would be a plus.
- Test the recruiter within the department by establishing a question and answer session to ensure the recruiter understands military matters. Invite the department’s military liaison officer to sit in on each session.
- Instruct the recruiter to invite veterans for ride-alongs, department visits, or schedule open-house gatherings
- Review the IACP’s Best Practices Guide on *Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover in Law Enforcement* (www.iacpsmallerdepts.org)

K. Social Networking

Discussion: Social networking today has rapidly become the method of communicating informally, reaching a very wide audience – military population included – and transmits the department’s recruiting message instantaneously. An agency’s message can be received by deployed servicemembers almost as fast as those who are not deployed

here in the United States.

Strategies:

- Carefully develop a department’s message on employment opportunities knowing it will be received quickly by prospective applicants around the world
- Update job openings, career fairs, marketing materials, and videos through these sites

Note: In addition to the department’s website, additional marketing on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter can reach a much larger population of veterans. Updating veterans at agency picnics, open house and crime prevention displays, and other law enforcement venues such as community or technical college graduations will certainly place your agency in a position to increase your marketing footprint.

L. Other Strategies

- Proactively, invite community leaders to department functions such as picnics, barbeques, game night, police week functions, citizen advisory groups, etc., so as to develop a rapport with citizens to broaden their understanding of the purpose, function, and support the LE organization provides
- Influence or provide oversight to the civil service process, if appropriate, for recruitment in those states or communities that utilize a centralized rather than a decentralized recruitment system.

IV. Appendix

Agencies that have contributed information and materials to this research:

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| Austin PD (TX) | Marietta PD (GA) |
| Baltimore PD (MD) | Montgomery County PD (MD) |
| Baltimore County PD (MD) | New York State Police (NY) |
| Barstow PD (CA) | Newport News PD (VA) |
| Bedford PD (MA) | North Carolina State Highway Patrol (NC) |
| Burlington PD (VT) | Pennsylvania State Police (PA) |
| Cape Coral PD (FL) | Prince George’s County PD (MD) |
| Charlotte-Mecklenburg PD (NC) | Sierra Vista PD (AZ) |
| City of Virginia Beach PD (VA) | Tewksbury PD (MA) |
| Colorado Springs PD (CO) | Vermont State Police (VT) |
| Delaware State Police (DE) | Virginia Beach PD (VA) |
| Denver PD (CO) | Washington State Patrol (WA) |
| Fairfax County PD (VA) | Waynesboro PD (VA) |
| Fayetteville PD (NC) | |
| Green Bay PD (WI) | |
| Greenfield PD (CA) | |
| Los Angeles County SD (CA) | |