



BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Bulletin

Recruiting & Retaining Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement

Under a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, the National Center for Women & Policing (NCWP) developed a self-assessment guide to assist agencies seeking to recruit and retain more women in sworn law enforcement positions. The resulting publication, *Recruiting & Retaining Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement*, is designed to help federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies examine their policies and procedures to identify and remove obstacles to hiring and retaining sworn and civilian women employees at all levels within the organization. It also provides a list of resources for agencies to use when they plan or implement changes to their current policies and procedures.

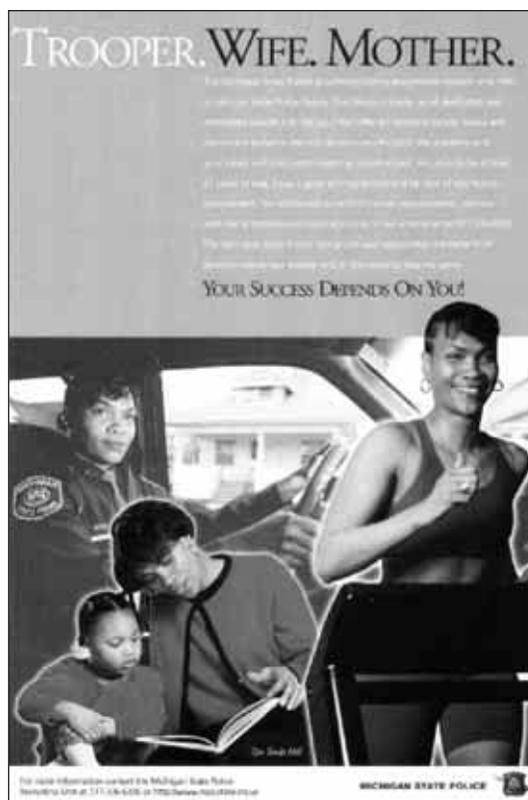
The guide promotes increasing the number of women at all ranks of law enforcement as a strategy to strengthen community policing, reduce police use of force, enhance police response to domestic violence, and provide balance to the workforce. Research conducted in the United States and internationally demonstrates that women police officers use a style of policing that relies less on physical strength, can effectively de-escalate potentially violent confrontations, are

less likely to become involved in the use of force, and respond effectively to violence against women.

Resources for Law Enforcement Agencies

This bulletin provides a brief overview of the information and resources available in *Recruiting & Retaining Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement*. Each chapter of the guide contains the following sections:

- **Statement of the Problem.** Administrators must understand the issues involved in hiring and retaining women before they can improve or implement new policies and procedures. In this section, the most common problems found in law enforcement agencies are discussed in detail to help agencies gain a more thorough understanding of the obstacles that exist to hiring and retaining women.
- **Legal Issues.** This section alerts administrators to issues involved in the hiring and retaining of women



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that may require legal input and review. Because employment law is frequently the subject of litigation and collective bargaining agreements, all changes to personnel policies and procedures should be reviewed with legal counsel before implementation.

- ❑ **Possible Solutions, Model Policies, and Practices.** This section provides solutions that may help agencies remove obstacles to hiring and retaining women. The detailed suggestions give practical guidance about each issue discussed in the problem statement.

Whenever possible, the guide includes descriptions of model policies being used by law enforcement agencies.
- ❑ **Expert Assistance, Reference Materials, Contact Persons, and Other Useful Information.** References, resources, and names of persons or agencies with pertinent expertise and innovative programs are provided. In addition, a complete bibliography of related articles is included at the end of the guide. Any future updates on innovative programs and model policies, contact information, and bibliographies will be provided on NCWP's Web site at www.feminist.org/police/ncwp.asp.
- ❑ **Checklist.** A comprehensive checklist at the end of each chapter provides an overview of the steps involved at each stage of the self-assessment process. At a glance, users of the guide can determine whether they have reviewed key policies and practices that have an impact on each major area of agency operations being assessed.

Hiring and Retaining Women: The Advantages to Law Enforcement Agencies

Nationwide, law enforcement agencies are confronting enormous challenges in recruiting qualified candidates, yet traditional recruiting strategies frequently overlook an entire pool of potential applicants—women. The number of women in law enforcement has remained small and the rate of increase slow. Recent surveys show that only 14.3 percent of sworn personnel are women, with an annual increase of only 0.5 percent over the past several years.¹

Law enforcement today is facing a crisis of public confidence and trust. Highly publicized incidents of police use of excessive force have generated headlines in cities around the country. Police brutality and corruption lawsuits are costing taxpayers millions of dollars each year, and the frequency and associated costs of such incidents are increasing.² Concurrently, police leaders and executives are under pressure to implement community- or service-oriented policing, transforming the very nature of the relationship between law enforcement and the communities it serves. Nationwide, communities are demanding that law enforcement agencies take a more modern approach to policing that emphasizes communication and cooperation with citizens and community-involved problem solving.

When reviewing this information, one may wonder, "What does all of this have to do with hiring and retaining more women?" Research conducted both in the United States and internationally clearly demonstrates that women police officers use a style of policing that relies less on physical force. They are better at defusing and de-escalating potentially violent confrontations with citizens and are less likely to become involved in incidents of excessive force. Additionally, women officers often possess better communication skills than their male counterparts and are better able to facilitate the cooperation and trust required to implement a community policing model. Thus, hiring and retaining more women in law enforcement is likely to be an effective means of addressing the problems of excessive force and citizen complaints.

Increasing the representation of women on the police force should address another costly problem for police administrators—the pervasive problem of sex discrimination and sexual harassment—by changing the climate of modern law enforcement agencies. Finally, female officers often respond more effectively to incidents

of violence against women—the single largest category of calls received by local police agencies nationwide.³

Assessing a Law Enforcement Agency

Many approaches can be used to conduct an assessment of a law enforcement agency. To conduct a comprehensive assessment, sufficient resources must be allocated and as many women as possible from all ranks within the agency should be involved in the assessment process. The guide offers practical advice on establishing a process to assess an agency on issues that pertain to recruiting and retaining women and recommends different approaches to assessment and who should be involved in the process.

Developing a Job Description

Many job descriptions for law enforcement officers are outdated and do not reflect the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for a community policing model. To develop the best job description for law enforcement officers, law enforcement agencies should emphasize the value that the organization places on community policing and detail the skills and duties required to successfully implement community policing practices. For example, the job description should highlight skills such as the ability to de-escalate violent situations, communicate with diverse groups of people, mediate disputes, and collaborate with other government and social service agencies to solve problems.

Recruiting Quality Candidates

Nationwide, law enforcement agencies are having difficulty recruiting women in large part because recruiting programs have not focused specifically on finding quality women candidates. Following are a few of the suggestions presented in the self-assessment guide to help agencies improve their recruiting programs. The guide is far more

comprehensive; agencies that wish to increase their numbers of women officers are encouraged to read the guide in its entirety.

Develop an effective recruiting program. To successfully increase the number of women in policing, law enforcement agencies should develop a specific plan of action that targets women in the recruiting process and emphasizes the agency's desire to significantly increase the number of women in its ranks. The self-assessment guide contains many recommendations to help achieve this goal, including forming a recruitment committee and designing recruitment posters that feature women.

Use the media to increase recruitment of women officers. Agencies should undertake activities

that maximize media attention and exposure for the department's efforts to recruit more women as law enforcement officers. The guide offers many suggestions on how to get the desired media exposure, including maintaining a Web site, advertising in publications with high female readership, and hosting career fairs or open houses that allow women to learn more about the job.

Monitor recruitment efforts. Once a recruitment program is implemented, staff should continually monitor and evaluate it to determine what works and what changes may need to be made. To effectively monitor and evaluate recruitment efforts, the employment application for law enforcement officers should contain questions about how the applicant learned about the

position. Careful data should be kept to determine which pieces of the recruitment plan are successful.

Removing Obstacles in the Selection Process

In addition to broadening outreach activities to attract more women applicants, agencies must examine their selection processes to identify and remove obstacles that have had an adverse impact on the hiring of women. With appropriate data collection, it is easy to discover where women are being "washed out" in the hiring process and identify which aspects of the process should be examined for gender bias. Improving the testing process that each applicant must complete will help agencies select

Six Advantages for Law Enforcement Agencies That Hire and Retain More Women

1. Women officers are proven to be as competent as their male counterparts. Research studies show no meaningful difference between male and female officers in their activities or productivity on patrol, their commitment to law enforcement organizations, their response to violent confrontations, and their performance evaluations received both at the academy and on the job.*
2. Women officers use a style of policing that relies less on physical force, and they are less likely to become involved in incidents of excessive force.**

3. Women officers bring skills and abilities to the job that help implement community-oriented policing, which facilitates cooperation and trust between police officers and citizens.
4. More women officers will improve a law enforcement agency's response to domestic violence against women—the largest single category of calls to local police departments.
5. Increasing the presence of female officers reduces the prevalence of sex discrimination, under utilization, and sexual harassment within an agency

- by reducing the numeric underrepresentation of female officers.
6. The presence of women in a law enforcement agency can bring about beneficial changes in policy for all officers. For example, one scholar noted that "the introduction of women will create an incentive . . . to examine many management practices that are less acceptable now that they must be applied to men and women alike. This may result in the development of improved selection criteria, performance standards, and supervision for all officers."[†]

*See for example, Snortum, John R., and John C. Beyers, "Patrol Activities of Male and Female Officers as a Function of Work Experience," 1983, *Police Studies* 6: 63–142; Fry, Louis W., and Sue Greenfeld, "An Examination of Attitudinal Differences Between Policewomen and Policemen," 1980, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 65(1): 123–126; Grennan, Sean A., "Findings on the Role of Officer Gender in Violent Encounters With Citizens," 1987, *Journal of Police Science and Administration* 15(1): 78–85; Jones, Catherine A., "Predicting the

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retrieved April 25, 2001, from the World Wide Web: www.feminist.org/police/ExcessiveForce.html; Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department, 1991, *Report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department: Summary*, Los Angeles, CA: Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department: 17.
[†]Bloch, Peter B., and Deborah Anderson, 1974, *Policewomen on Patrol: Final Report*, Washington, DC: The Urban Institute: 1–67.



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the best candidates for positions as community police officers and will protect agencies from discrimination lawsuits.

Areas of the selection process that should be examined include—

Physical testing. Entry-level physical ability tests are often outdated, are not job-related, and test for physical requirements not needed to perform the job of a modern law enforcement officer. Test developers should carefully and thoroughly evaluate the physical duties to be performed by law enforcement officers.

Written examinations. As a group, women usually do quite well on written examinations. However, these tests may have an adverse impact on women and men of color and, if they do, the agency must demonstrate that the questions are job-related and are being asked to predict job success. Legal and testing experts should be consulted when agencies design or revise written examinations.

Oral interviews. The structured oral interview is an area in which gender bias may manifest itself and have a negative impact on women. The oral interview panel should be gender and

racially diverse and include members of the local community. Sworn and civilian law enforcement employees also may be used as panelists. All raters should be supportive of women in policing and thoroughly trained in the rules of the interview process. The questions developed for the oral interview should test for the skills and abilities needed for community policing, including the ability to work with all types of people, de-escalate violence, mediate disputes, and solve problems. The same questions should be asked of each candidate, regardless of whether the candidate is male or female.

Background investigations. A good background investigation is crucial to hiring the right person. Background investigators should have a thorough understanding of the types of persons the chief executive of the law enforcement agency wants to hire. The self-assessment guide provides information on how the background investigation process can be improved to ensure that candidates are thoroughly and fairly screened. Some of the procedures covered in the guide are—

- ❑ Screening and training background investigators.
- ❑ Screening applicants for gender bias.

- ❑ Screening applicants for the skills needed for domestic violence calls and the propensity to use violence.

Designing Quality Recruit Academies and Field Training Programs

Biased training academies and field training programs can wash out a large number of women recruits. The boot-camp model of training should be replaced with training that is based on adult learning techniques. Studies have shown that adults respond best to training that is varied in presentation such as video, lecture, and role-playing. Experts in adult learning should be consulted and should assist in developing effective training programs. The guide discusses how to do the following:

- ❑ Establish a training committee.
- ❑ Develop a training curriculum.
- ❑ Select academy instructors.
- ❑ Develop a physical fitness and skills training program.
- ❑ Train recruits in the use of firearms.
- ❑ Maintain a harassment-free work environment.
- ❑ Select field training officers (FTOs).
- ❑ Review the field training program and its officers.
- ❑ Monitor the progress of recruits.

Mentoring To Increase Retention

Because women continue to be underrepresented in law enforcement, they face additional challenges. Most significantly, sexual harassment and gender discrimination continue to be key reasons women cite for leaving law enforcement.⁴ Women report that they often feel isolated when they join the department and have no one to whom they can turn for advice or support. Mentoring programs can assist in the retention and promotion of female employees. The goal of creating such programs is to cultivate one-to-one partnerships between new and veteran

officers that will encourage employees to reach their fullest potential as law enforcement professionals.

Valuing Civilian Employees

In most law enforcement agencies, a large percentage of the civilian employees are women. Law enforcement agencies need to be aware of employment issues facing these employees. For example, promotional opportunities have frequently been limited for civilian personnel and should be expanded at every opportunity, including consideration of qualified candidates for sworn positions. Other possible solutions and incentives include ensuring equal pay and benefits, using inclusive language when speaking to both sworn and civilian members, and including civilian members in training programs designed for sworn members.

Implementing Family-Friendly Policies

Many law enforcement administrators are worried about retaining qualified women officers. When one study examined why women left the Canadian police force at almost twice the rate of men, women cited family-related issues (i.e., pregnancy and childcare) as the main reasons they left policing.⁵ The first step a department can take is to develop a comprehensive policy regarding pregnancy and childcare issues. A department's policy should cover the following areas:

- ❑ Eligibility for and duration of pregnancy and childcare leave.
- ❑ Light duty.
- ❑ Range qualification.
- ❑ Uniforms.
- ❑ Disability insurance and paid leave benefits.

Monitoring Performance Evaluations

Performance evaluation systems are often problematic for law enforcement agencies. Many agencies that have adopted community-oriented policing have not yet updated their performance evaluation systems. Therefore, officers may be evaluated on behaviors that differ from the desired behaviors. Because performance evaluations are frequently used as the basis for making decisions on transfers, specialty assignments, and promotions, a fair and unbiased evaluation system is essential to a law enforcement agency. Possible means of creating such a system include determining what performance skills should be evaluated, determining how those skills should be measured, setting performance goals, and reviewing evaluations for bias.

Assignments and Promotions

Many law enforcement officers pursue assignments to specialty units. Not only do these assignments provide new challenges and duties, they also help broaden the officer's experience and enhance promotional opportunities. For those reasons, assignments can be an area in which discrimination occurs. Two main areas of concern exist regarding promoting women in law enforcement. First, the promotional process and criteria may be biased against women. Second, women may choose not to apply for promotions. To encourage women to seek promotions, agencies should actively recruit and promote women through promotional processes that are fair and unbiased and ensure that the agency has family-friendly programs in place. A review of the entire promotional process should be undertaken to identify where women are eliminated or rated lower than men.

Preventing Sexual and Gender Harassment, Discrimination, and Retaliation

Sexual harassment is prevalent in most law enforcement agencies. Studies have found that 60 to 70 percent of women officers experienced sexual/gender harassment. Interestingly, only 4 to 6 percent of these women ever reported the harassment.⁶ This lack of reporting can be directly attributed to the code of silence in law enforcement agencies and the severe retaliation that occurs when women report misconduct. Agencies need to have strong policies and directives that prohibit such conduct, directives for immediate investigation of allegations of unlawful acts, and appropriate disciplinary measures in place in case such allegations are substantiated. The guide outlines in detail what measures should be taken and how personnel should be trained to prevent such activities in the workplace.

Ensuring Impartial Internal Investigation and Discipline Systems

An effective and fair internal investigation system is crucial to maintaining the credibility and responsiveness of law enforcement. Most law enforcement agencies have a system for receiving and investigating complaints of officer misconduct. Unfortunately, the very systems that are established to investigate officer misconduct have the potential to be misused as tools to harass or retaliate against employees. Women officers have reported that when they filed complaints of discrimination or harassment, they became subsequent targets of internal investigations based on complaints that were often anonymous or false. To prevent such incidents from taking place, law enforcement agencies should have written guidelines that clearly spell out the process for reporting and investigating allegations of misconduct.

Safeguards must be built into the investigation process to prevent retaliation against persons who report misconduct.

Developing Effective Awards and Recognition Programs

Many law enforcement agencies use award programs to motivate their employees. Traditionally, recognition is given only for heroism or for solving a major crime case. Some agencies give awards to employees who have been part of successful, innovative programs. Very few agencies give awards or recognize employees whose work reflects the principles of community policing. Even fewer agencies recognize those that maintain a workplace free of harassment and discrimination, mentor women and minorities, or increase the diversity of the workforce. Law enforcement agencies can use the issue of awards and recognition as an opportunity to gain employee and community input. A diverse committee should be established to develop criteria for formal awards. The following are examples of ways to recognize employees who support community policing and diversity in the workplace:

- ❑ Assign the employees to highly desirable positions.
- ❑ Select personnel for special training programs or conferences.
- ❑ Promote people who have demonstrated an understanding of and support for the concepts of community policing.

Assistance Available to Law Enforcement Agencies

To assist law enforcement agencies that wish to increase the number of women employees in their workforce, the National Center for Women & Policing offers the following services:

- ❑ A regional training seminar on recruiting and retaining women.

This 2-day seminar helps law enforcement agencies develop effective recruiting programs to increase the number of female employees.

- ❑ Online updates to the self-assessment guide. New programs in law enforcement agencies across the country are described on the Web site and readers can gain access to the latest research about women in policing and other critical issues (www.feminist.org/police/ncwp.asp).
- ❑ Onsite consulting by a team of professional law enforcement experts to help agencies identify and remove obstacles to recruiting and retaining women.

For additional information on these services, contact the National Center for Women & Policing at 323-651-2532 or via e-mail at womencops@feminist.org.

Notes

1. National Center for Women & Policing, 2000, *Equality Denied: The Status of Women in Policing: 1999*, Los Angeles, CA: National Center for Women & Policing.
2. Kappeler, Victor E., Stephen F. Kappeler, and Rolando V. Del Carmen, 1993, "A Content Analysis of Police Civil Liability Cases: Decisions of the Federal District Courts 1978-1990," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 21: 325-337.
3. Homant, Robert J., and Daniel B. Kennedy, 1985, "Police Perceptions of Spousal Abuse—A Comparison of Male and Female Officers," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 13: 29-47.
4. Williams, Julie, 2000, "Mentoring for Law Enforcement" *FBI Bulletin*, Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation: 19-25; Poole, Eric D., and Mark R. Pogrebin, 1988, "Factors Affecting the Decision to Remain in Policing: A Study of Women Officers," *Journal of Police Science and Administration* 16(3): 49-55.

5. Seagram, Belinda Crawford, and Connie Stark-Adames, 1992, "Women in Canadian Urban Policing: Why Are They Leaving?," *The Police Chief* October: 120-127.

6. Polisar, Joseph, and Donna Milgram, 1998, "Recruiting, Integrating, and Retraining Women Police Officers: Strategies That Work," *The Police Chief* October: 42-53.

For Further Information

For further information about *Retaining & Recruiting Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement*, contact:

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Copies of the guide are available from the BJA Clearinghouse.

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Clearinghouse staff are available Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. eastern time. Ask to be placed on the BJA mailing list.

U.S. Department of Justice Response Center

1-800-421-6770 or 202-307-1480

Response Center staff are available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. eastern time.

Acknowledgments

Chief Penny Harrington, Director of the National Center for Women & Policing, is the principal author of the guide and received input and assistance from an advisory board made up of the following people:

Research Director John Firman, International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Undersheriff Carol Daly, Sacramento County Sheriff's Office, California, representing the National Sheriffs' Association.

Executive Director Sylvester Daughtry, Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc.

Executive Director Robert Stewart, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives.

U.S. Marshal Rosa Melendez, U.S. Marshals Service, representing the Hispanic American Police Commanding Officers Association.

Commander Gary Gee, Bay Area Rapid Transit Police, representing the Asian American Commanding Officers' Association.

Ombudsman Laura Goodman-Brown, Minnesota State Office of Crime Victims' Ombudsman, representing the International Association of Women Police.

Chief Katherine Baldwin, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights, Employment Litigation Section.

Steve Stanard, CEO, Stanard and Associates.

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Chief Charles Moose, Montgomery County Police Department, Maryland.

Sheriff Margo Frasier, Travis County Sheriff's Office, Texas.

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The self-assessment guide was field tested by the Fairfax County Police, Virginia (headed by Chief Richard Rappoport), and the Boise Police, Idaho (headed by Captain Mike Prynch).

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Leila Wieser, Writer/Editor, Aspen Systems Corporation, provided editorial and production support for this bulletin.

This document was prepared by the National Center for Women & Policing, under grant number 1999-LD-VX-0003, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime.