

## Recruitment and Retention Study Series



Detention Facility Personnel

April 2003

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## Executive Summary

The Governor's Crime Commission, in conjunction with the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission and the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission, held a joint planning retreat in the early summer of 2000 to identify and address the major emerging issues facing the state's criminal justice system and its public safety personnel.

Based on the planning group's recommended plan of action a research study team was assembled which consisted of staff members from the three criminal justice commissions. The study team held several meetings and decided that the most appropriate course of action would be to conduct several smaller studies with each targeting the unique attributes and distinct features associated with recruiting and retaining sworn police personnel, sworn sheriff's office personnel, detention officers and public safety telecommunications officials. Thus, this report is one of four, in a series, which examine the issue of recruitment and retention among North Carolina's public safety agencies.

A three part, 22 item survey was developed by the study team and administered to 78 detention facilities which were randomly selected based upon a stratified sampling technique which divided the state's detention facilities into four groups based on the number of full-time detention personnel. Forty-eight surveys were returned producing a response rate of 55.1 percent.

Over half of the respondents described their recruitment strategy as being neutral, i.e. non-aggressive nor overly passive. Nearly one-quarter of the survey participants did describe their detention officer recruitment efforts as aggressive with one agency (2.3%) noting that a strongly aggressive recruitment campaign was present, and ongoing, within their agency.

As part of the survey respondents were asked to indicate which recruitment techniques their respective departments utilize when searching for detention officer applicants. The three most frequently employed techniques were word of mouth (97.7%), community colleges (69.8%) and newspapers (67.4%). Based on the data detention facilities are using a wide range of recruitment techniques with all but three of the provided techniques being used by more than 50 percent of the agencies in the sample. The Police Corps, radio/television and the Internet were the three most infrequently employed techniques.

Respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their agencies' recruitment techniques on a scale from zero to nine with nine indicating the greatest degree of effectiveness. Effectiveness ratings closely mirrored the extent to which agencies use the various techniques with the most frequently used methods also being rated as the most effective. Word of mouth received an average rating of 6.9, followed by the community college system (4.7) and newspapers (4.6).

Over half of the respondents noted that their offices do not currently have a waiting list, or backlog, of qualified detention officers. Twenty-six agencies (63.4%) reported this fact with the remaining departments possessing a current waiting list of applicants. Of those agencies with waiting lists the number of applicants, on those lists, ranged from one to 49 with the average statewide waiting list, or backlog, containing 9.3 detention applicants.

Respondents were also asked to provide information on the average number of applicants for each vacant detention officer position. The number of applicants, per position, ranged from one to 33 with a statewide average of 7.6 applicants per vacant detention officer position.

The research team identified ten possible obstacles, or barriers, to recruiting more qualified applicants with the survey respondents being asked to list all which have negatively impacted upon local recruitment in their respective agencies. The most common barriers were agency budget (83.7%), competition with other criminal justice agencies (65.1%) and the applicants' prior criminal histories (48.8%). Agency size (11.6%), residency requirements (9.3%) and the location of the detention facility (2.3%) were viewed as the least problematic barriers to effectively recruiting detention personnel.

The study team also thought it was important to ascertain the extent to which detention offices hire applicants, who have already completed the Basic Detention Officer Certification Course, versus hiring applicants and then sponsoring their training during the state mandated time period after employment. The percentage of applicants who are hired prior to completing the certification course ranged from one to 100 percent with only three (7.0 %) agencies hiring all of their applicants after completion of the course.

Responses from fourteen agencies (32.6%) indicate that 100 percent of their new hires are employed first with admittance into a certification program occurring thereafter. Across the entire study sample the average detention facility hires between 14 and 21 percent of its applicants from an applicant pool that has already completed a certification program. The remaining 79 to 86 percent of the new hires are employed prior to attending a Basic Detention Officer Certification Course.

Survey respondents were asked, through an open-ended question, to comment on any ideas that they had for improving the quality of future detention officer applicant pools. Responses tended to cluster in three areas – salaries, advanced training and better recruitment efforts. Of those respondents, who answered the question, 17 (60.7%) suggested either increasing the entry-level starting salary and/or increasing the salaries of those detention officers who are already working within the facility.

Turnover rates for detention officer positions, using July, 2001 as a base, ranged from zero to 80 percent with an average turnover rate of 21.4 percent being reported for those agencies returning completed surveys. Thirty-one percent of the respondents noted that their agency's turnover rate has remained stable for the past three years. Slightly more than a quarter of the agencies experienced either a significant, or slight, rise in their respective turnover rates while turnover rates dropped for 36.6 percent of the detention facilities.

Vacancy rates, using June, 2002 as a base, ranged from zero to 100 percent with approximately one-third (31.7%) of the agencies reporting a full detention officer force with no vacant positions on June 30th, 2002. The average vacancy rate, for detention positions, was 12.7 percent. As with turnover rates nearly half of the participating agencies (41.5%) reported that their respective vacancy rates had not changed over the past three years. Slightly less than a quarter (24.4%) reported an increase in their vacancy rates, over the last three years, with 34.4 percent noting a decline during this period.

Respondents were offered a list of six different techniques for personnel retention and were asked to specify each technique which is utilized by their agencies and to rank each in terms of their effectiveness on a scale from zero, not effective, to nine, highly effective. The most popular retention strategy was annual pay increases, irrespective of job performance, such as cost of living adjustments and longevity (88.4%). The second most frequently employed retention technique was formal promotions (72.1%) followed by education and training incentives such as tuition reimbursement and allowing detention officers to attend classes on departmental time (62.8%).

While formal promotions were more frequently used their effectiveness ratings were reported as extremely lower than the other retention techniques. In other words, while detention management officials frequently promote detention officers they do not view these promotions as being the most effective and beneficial means for retaining their employees. Other infrequently used techniques were perceived to be more effective such as assigning favorable work shifts, providing formal awards, offering other types of recognition programs and performance based pay increases.

Agency budget restrictions were reported as the most frequently discussed factor when explaining why detention officers leave the department. A high percentage of the respondents also noted that transfers, to other law enforcement agencies, and individuals resigning to accept employment in the private sector were substantial factors which impact upon their respective agency attrition rates. Job related duties and retirement were also significant factors with more than half of the responding agencies commenting that their departments lose officers for these reasons. Agency location, size and residency requirements were the least frequently reported attrition factors yet still occurred in 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the participating detention facilities.

Respondents were asked to identify the extent to which each factor impacts their agency's attrition, i.e. to select the best response from a range of percentages. Nearly one-half of the respondents (44%) noted that agency budget restrictions accounted for 71-100 percent of their agency's total attrition rate. Almost half of the detention facility respondents stated that 50 percent, or more, of their agency's attrition rate could be explained by officers transferring to other criminal justice agencies. Forty percent of those surveyed stated that more than half of their departments' attrition rates were due to officers accepting work in the private sector.

Further questions were asked in an effort to refine, and explore at a much more detailed level, the extent to which transfers, to other criminal justice agencies, impact detention facility attrition. Specifically, to ascertain which types of agencies detention officers are transferring to, or accepting employment with, once they terminate their employment with the detention facility. Seventy-two percent, of the responding agencies, lost officers to larger criminal justice agencies. Transfers to state criminal justice agencies was the second highest reported type of transfer (58.1%) followed by employment with similar size departments (48.8%). Over thirty percent of the detention facilities lost personnel to smaller agencies.

On the average only 21.6 percent of the detention officers, who leave the facility, are being reassigned to full time law enforcement status through intradepartmental transfers. This means that 78.4 percent of the statewide turnover is attributable to detention personnel completely exiting the agency to pursue employment elsewhere.

Overall, irrespective of the reasons why officers leave, the average length of an officer's employment is 21 months before he/she decides to leave the facility. Seventy-five percent of the agencies reported an average length of stay of two years or less. Thus, it appears that a critical period of two years exists in which detention facilities can implement policies and/or programs to improve retention rates and conversely minimize its attrition rate by retaining officers beyond a two-year period.

Across the entire survey sample only 3.7 percent of the detention officers also held sworn deputy status. This suggests that many Sheriffs' Offices are developing dual career tracks in which detention work is viewed as a separate, and equally respected, profession comparable to the law enforcement field.

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to freely express ideas for improving detention facility retention rates. Not surprisingly, the number one recommended method for improving retention revolved around the salary and benefits issue. However, quite a few varied responses were obtained with several innovative ideas being offered as to how detention personnel can be retained through non-salary related means.



A series of policy relevant research questions were examined, using the survey data, in an effort to further delineate recruitment and retention issues among the state's detention facility personnel. Answers to these questions, actual quantitative survey data and the respondents' qualitative suggestions for improving recruitment and retention were compiled and analyzed to produce a series of three policy implications and recommendations. These included launching more aggressive recruitment efforts and exploring new and non-traditional recruitment techniques; directing consideration to expanding the availability of in-service and advanced training, as tools for enhancing retention; as well as examining the issue of applicant criminal histories in a much more detailed and systematic manner.

## Introduction/Study Rationale

The Governor's Crime Commission, in conjunction with the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission and the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission, held a joint planning retreat in the early summer of 2000 to identify and address the major emerging issues facing the state's criminal justice system and its public safety personnel. As part of this planning endeavor members of the three commissions were divided into four focus group teams – professional development, public policy, funding and recruitment and retention. Each team reviewed the major issues and obstacles in their respective areas, outlined a series of goals and objectives and concluded by formulating a specific plan of action to attain their stated goals. A summary of the work conducted by the recruitment and retention team is provided below with this report being a direct product of the focus team's recommendations.

## Topics of Discussion

The recruitment and retention working group identified six major areas of discussion during the joint planning session:

1. Recruitment and retention of law enforcement and correctional personnel.
2. Law enforcement retirement.
3. Establish minimum screening standards for entrance into BLET.
4. Certification versus licensing.
5. State subsidized salary increases linked to professional certificate program.
6. Minimum salary for law enforcement officers.

## Recruitment and Retention Objectives

Following the group's discussion of these topic areas, ten concrete objectives were delineated:

1. Develop partnerships with colleges and high schools (early recruitment).
2. Enhance the ability to identify and attract quality applicants.

3. Establish stronger minimum screening standards for BLET.
4. Become more competitive with the private sector.
5. Public recognition through marketing of the criminal justice profession.
6. Conduct a study which examines the recruitment and retention of criminal justice personnel.
7. Become more competitive with the private sector relative to compensation packages, i.e. salary, take-home vehicles, retirement plans and benefits.
8. Adequate resources relative to staffing, equipment and training.
9. Develop work environment competitively relative to overall employee wellness.
10. Review and further develop career opportunities.

### Plan of Action

*The focus team outlined a specific plan of action in order to achieve its objectives and better improve the recruitment and retention of criminal justice personnel in North Carolina. This plan consisted of the following key components:*

1. Encourage criminal justice administrators to identify key decision-makers in schools for the purpose of developing early recruitment strategies and partnerships.
2. Assemble a recruitment and retention study team consisting of staff from the three commissions.
3. Develop a marketing strategy and disseminate recruitment packets.
4. Provide fiscal resources to support legislatively mandated initiatives.
5. Develop and implement a wellness program for criminal justice employees.
6. Develop and implement a program for upward and lateral mobility at all levels.

Based on the planning group's recommended plan of action a research study team was assembled which consisted of staff members from the three criminal justice commissions. The study team held several meetings and decided that the most appropriate course of action would be to conduct several smaller studies with each targeting the unique attributes and distinct features associated with recruiting and retaining sworn police personnel, sworn sheriff's office personnel, detention officers and public safety telecommunications officials. Thus, this report is one of four, in a series, which examine the issue of recruitment and retention among North Carolina's public safety agencies.

## Methods

### Survey Instrument

A three part, 22 item survey was developed by the study team with the first section of the questionnaire presenting questions which addressed the issue of recruiting detention officers. The survey items dealt with recruitment strategies and techniques, the number of applicants and the extent to which the responding agency had a backlog or waiting list of potential candidates. Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment on what course(s) of action should be undertaken to improve the recruitment of detention personnel and to build a more qualified applicant pool.

Part two addressed the issue of attrition and retention and included questions which were designed to detail the responding agency's turnover and vacancy rates and how these have varied over the past three years. Other questions focused on obstacles which hinder successful recruitment, techniques for retaining detention officers and reasons why officers leave the agency. Respondents were also given the chance to offer suggestions for improving personnel retention.

The final section of the questionnaire allowed the agencies to note any concerns, comments or suggestions, regarding all recruitment and retention issues, which they felt should be brought to the attention of the three commissions. Respondents were also queried to determine if the responding agency conducted closeout interviews upon an applicant's exit from the agency.

### Survey Sample

A list of North Carolina's detention facilities was provided by staff of the Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission and was used as the basis for selecting those facilities which would be included in the survey sample. The list was divided into four groups, or quartiles, based upon the median number of detention personnel.

A proportionate number of agencies, relative to the percent of agencies in each of the four groups, were sampled and selected to receive a copy of the survey in the mail. A total of 78 surveys were distributed with 20 (25.6 %) going to agencies with more than 45 officers, 22 (28.2%) to agencies with 23 to 45 sworn officers and 18 (23.1%) being mailed to agencies with 11 to 22 sworn officers. The remaining 18 surveys (23.1%) were mailed to the state’s smallest detention facilities as defined as having fewer than 11 detention officers.

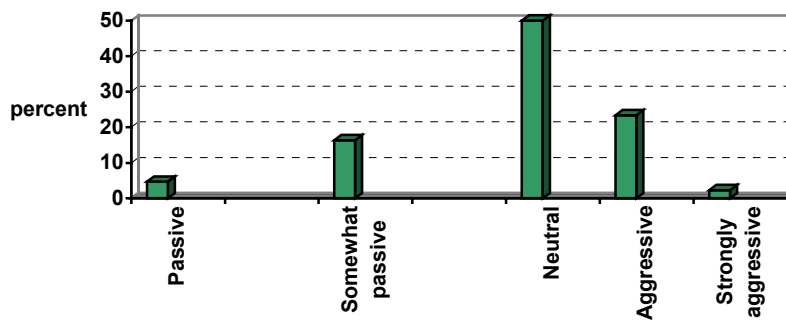
## Results

A total of 43 surveys were completed and returned by detention facility personnel producing a study return rate of 55.1 percent.

### Recruitment Issues

As Figure 1 documents over half of the respondents described their recruitment strategy as being neutral, i.e. non-aggressive nor overly passive. Nearly one-fourth of the survey participants did describe their detention officer recruitment efforts as aggressive with one agency (2.3%) noting that a strongly aggressive recruitment campaign was present, and ongoing, within their agency.

Figure 1 Perceived Strength of Agency Recruitment Strategy



As part of the survey respondents were asked to indicate which recruitment techniques their respective departments use when searching for detention officer applicants. As Table 1 depicts the three most frequently employed techniques were word of mouth (97.7%), community colleges (69.8%) and newspapers (67.4%). Based on the data detention facilities are using a wide range of recruitment techniques with all but three of the techniques being used by more than 50 percent of the agencies in the sample. The Police Corp, radio/television and the Internet were the three most infrequently employed techniques.

Respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their agencies' recruitment techniques on a scale from zero to nine with nine indicating the greatest degree of effectiveness. Effectiveness ratings closely mirrored the extent to which agencies use the various techniques with the most frequently used methods also being rated as the most effective. Word of mouth received an average rating of 6.9, followed by the community college system (4.7) and newspapers (4.6).

Table 1 Recruitment Techniques and their Perceived Effectiveness

Technique	Number Using	% Using	Average Effectiveness Rating (0 to 9)
Word of Mouth	42	97.7%	6.9
Community College	30	69.8%	4.7
Newspaper	29	67.4%	4.6
Local Personnel Listings	27	62.8%	4.8
Auxiliary/Reserves	27	62.8%	3.7
Job Fairs	24	55.8%	2.6
Internet	20	46.5%	2.8
Police Corps	17	39.5%	.9
Radio/TV	15	34.9%	.9

Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all recruitment techniques which were utilized by their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

Over half of the respondents noted that their offices do not currently have a waiting list, or backlog, of qualified detention officers. Twenty-six agencies (63.4%) reported this fact with the remaining departments possessing a current waiting list of applicants. Of those agencies with waiting lists the number of applicants, on those lists, ranged from one to 49 with the average statewide waiting list, or backlog, containing 9.3 detention applicants.

Respondents were also asked to provide information on the average number of applicants for each vacant detention officer position. The number of applicants, per position, ranged from one to 33 with a statewide average of 7.6 applicants per vacant detention officer position.

The research team identified ten possible obstacles, or barriers, to recruiting more qualified applicants with the survey respondents being asked to list all which have negatively impacted upon local recruitment in their respective agencies. As Figures 2 and 3 suggest the most common barriers were agency budget (83.7%), competition with other criminal justice agencies (65.1%) and the applicants' prior criminal histories (48.8%). Agency size (11.6%), residency requirements (9.3%) and the location of the detention facility (2.3%) were viewed as the least problematic barriers to effectively recruiting detention personnel. Other obstacles, listed by the respondents, included applicant use of cocaine and applicants who have bad credit ratings.

Figure 2 Barriers to Effectively Recruiting the Best Possible Candidates

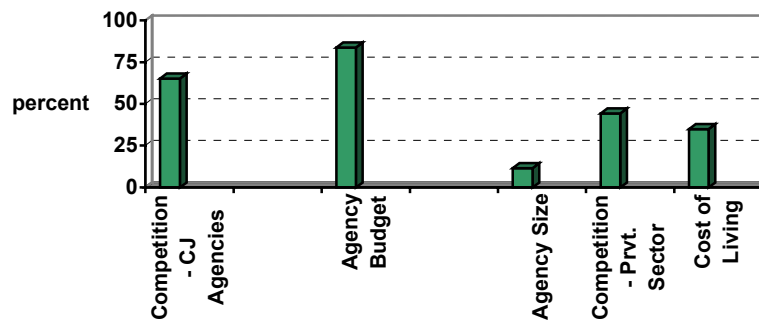
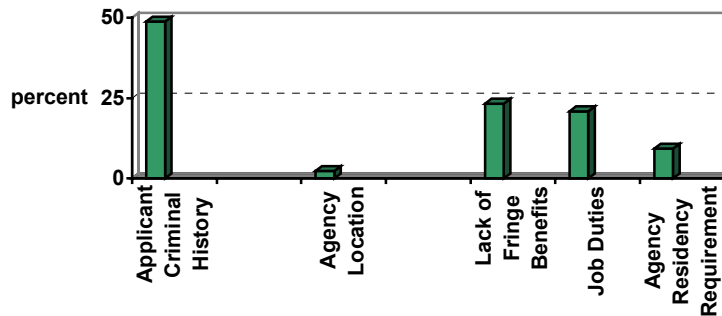


Figure 3 Barriers to Effectively Recruiting the Best Possible Candidates



*The study team also thought it was important to ascertain the extent to which detention offices hire applicants, who have already completed the Basic Detention Officer Certification Course, versus hiring applicants and then sponsoring their training during the state mandated time period after employment. Survey questions addressed both sides of the coin by soliciting participants to state the percent of both pre and post training hires. The percentage of applicants who are hired prior to completing the certification course ranged from one to 100 percent with only three (7.0 %) agencies hiring all of their applicants after completion of the course.*

Responses from fourteen agencies (32.6%) indicate that 100 percent of their new hires are employed first with admittance into a certification program occurring thereafter. Across the entire study sample the average detention facility hires between 14 and 21 percent of its applicants from an applicant pool that has already completed a certification program. The remaining 79 to 86 percent of the new hires are employed prior to attending a Basic Detention Officer Certification Course.

Survey respondents were asked, through an open-ended question, to comment on any ideas that they had for improving the quality of future detention officer applicant pools. Responses tended to cluster in three areas – salaries, advanced training and better recruitment efforts. Of those respondents, who answered the question, 17 (60.7%) suggested either increasing the entry-level starting salary and/or increasing the salaries of



those detention officers who are already working within the facility. Illustrative comments included:

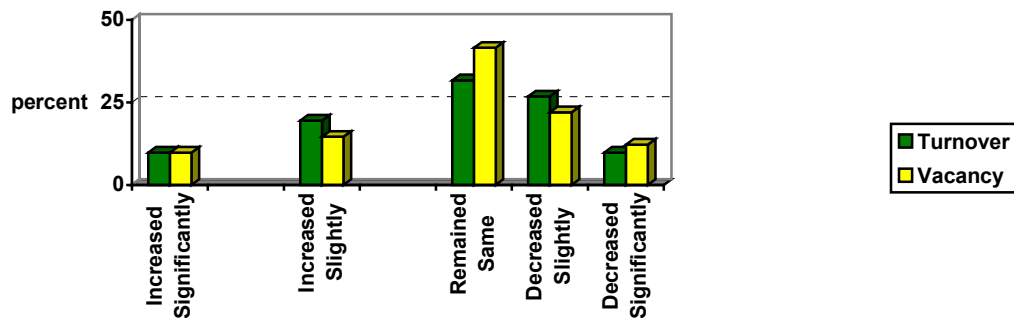
- Improve current salary ranges
- Make the pay and retirement policies better for detention officers. This would help in improving the quality of the applicants
- None by the commission; local level yes.
- Advanced training to enhance career path
- Better pay
- Ethics-Diversity training
- Aggressive recruiting within colleges and military. Higher pay-better retirement would entice better applicants.
- More pay-More training-Better facilities
- Increase salaries-Increase standards and training to meet BLET standards so jail detention will not be 2nd class viewed.
- More in-service training geared specifically for Detention Officers
- Provide higher salaries.
- Better pay. More promotions of the career field as a professional career not just as a step to become a fully sworn deputy.
- More aggressive advertising

### Attrition and Retention Issues

Turnover rates for detention officer positions, using July, 2001 as a base, ranged from zero to 80 percent with an average turnover rate of 21.4 percent being reported for those agencies returning completed surveys. As Figure 4 documents 31.7 percent of the respondents noted that their agency's turnover rate has remained stable for the past three years. Slightly more than a quarter of the agencies experienced either a significant, or

slight, rise in their respective turnover rates while turnover rates dropped for 36.6 percent of the detention facilities.

Figure 4 Turnover and Vacancy Rates Over the Past Three Years



Vacancy rates, using June, 2002 as a base, ranged from zero to 100 percent with approximately one-third (31.7%) of the agencies reporting a full detention officer force with no vacant positions on June 30, 2002. The average vacancy rate, for detention positions, was 12.7 percent. As with turnover rates nearly half of the participating agencies (41.5%) reported that their respective vacancy rates had not changed over the past three years. Slightly less than a fourth (24.4%) reported an increase in their vacancy rates, over the last three years, with 34.4 percent noting a decline during this period.

Respondents were offered a list of six different techniques for personnel retention and were asked to specify each technique which is used by their agencies and to rank each in terms of their effectiveness on a scale from zero, not effective, to nine, highly effective. As Table 2 reveals the most popular retention strategy was annual pay increases, irrespective of job performance, such as cost of living adjustments and longevity (88.4%). The second most frequently employed retention technique was formal promotions (72.1%) followed by education and training incentives such as tuition reimbursement and allowing detention officers to attend classes on departmental time (62.8%).

Survey participant ratings, on the effectiveness of the six retention techniques, are also provided in Table 2. While formal promotions were more frequently used their effectiveness ratings were reported as extremely lower than the other retention techniques. In other words, while detention management officials frequently promote detention officers they do not view these promotions as being the most effective and beneficial means for retaining their employees. Other infrequently used techniques were perceived to be more effective such as assigning favorable work shifts, providing formal awards, offering other types of recognition programs and performance based pay increases.

Table 2 Retention Techniques and their Perceived Effectiveness

Technique	Number Using	% Using	Average Effectiveness Rating (0 to 9)
Annual pay increase irrespective of performance	38	88.4%	5.7
Promotions	31	72.1%	4.3
Education/Training	27	62.8%	5.2
Formal recognition/ award ceremonies	23	53.5%	4.7
Performance based pay increase	23	53.5%	5.2
Assigning favorable work shift	21	48.8%	4.7

Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all retention techniques which were utilized by their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

Table 3 Causal Factors for Detention Officer Attrition Rates

Factor	Number Reporting	Percentage
Agency budget	40	93.7%
Accepted work in private sector	31	72.1%
Transfer to other criminal justice agency	29	67.4%
Job duties	25	58.1%
Retirement	23	53.5%
Cost of living	21	48.8%
Prior/Current criminal history, decertification	19	44.2%
Lack of fringe benefits	17	39.5%
Unrealistic officer expectations	16	37.2%
Agency location	15	34.9%
Agency size	15	34.9%
Residency requirement	14	32.6%

Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all attrition factors which affect their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

Table 3 depicts the top three reasons which explain attrition rates within the responding detention facilities, with agency budget restrictions being reported as the most frequently discussed factor, when explaining why detention officers leave the department. A high percentage of the respondents also noted that transfers, to other law enforcement agencies, and individuals resigning to accept employment in the private sector were substantial factors which impact upon their respective agency attrition rates. Job related duties and retirement were also significant factors with more than half of the responding agencies commenting that their departments lose officers for these reasons. Agency location, size and residency requirements were the least frequently reported attrition factors yet still occurred in one-third of the participating detention facilities.

Respondents were asked to identify the extent to which each factor impacts their agency's attrition, i.e. to select the best response from a range of percentages. Nearly one-half of the respondents (44%) noted that agency budget restrictions accounted for 71-100 percent of their agency's total attrition rate. Almost half of the detention facility respondents stated that 50 percent, or more, of their agency's attrition rate could be explained by officers transferring to other criminal justice agencies. Forty percent of those surveyed stated that more than half of their departments' attrition rates were due to officers accepting work in the private sector. More than a quarter of the respondents suggested that poor, or non-existent, cost of living adjustments were driving away 30 to 50 percent of their officers.

All of the remaining factors were discounted as significant contributors with the majority of the respondents noting that these factors account for less than ten percent of their agency's total attrition. In other words, agency budget restrictions, lateral transfers, losing officers to the private sector and the lack of acceptable cost of living adjustments account for the bulk of detention facility attrition rates. While the remaining factors do explain some attrition, or occur in a large number of the departments, they do not occur frequently enough to drive a sizeable decline in a detention facility's workforce.

Other reasons why detention officers are leaving the facility include:

- Poor working conditions due to old and deteriorating jails
- Job stress and burnout

- Disciplinary reasons, policy violations, inappropriate involvement with inmates
- Frustration with inability to transfer to road patrol

Further questions were asked in an effort to refine, and explore at a much more detailed level, the extent to which transfers, to other criminal justice agencies, impact detention facility attrition. Specifically, to ascertain which types of agencies detention officers are transferring to, or accepting employment with, once they terminate their employment with the detention facility. (Refer to Table 4).

Table 4 Detention Facility Attrition Rates – Other Criminal Justice Agencies

Factor	Number Reporting	Percentage
Employment with larger criminal justice agency	31	72.1%
Employment with state criminal justice agency	25	58.1%
Employment with same size agency	21	48.8%
Employment with smaller criminal justice agency	15	34.9%

Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all transfer types which affect their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

Seventy-two percent of the responding agencies lost officers to larger criminal justice agencies. Transfers to state criminal justice agencies was the second highest reported type of transfer (58.1%) followed by employment with similar size departments (48.8%). Over thirty percent of the detention facilities lost personnel to smaller agencies.

Over half of the respondents revealed that transfers to larger agencies accounted for 21 to 50 percent of their agencies' total attrition rates, while one in five respondents commented that this type of transfer explained between 61 to 70 percent of their agencies' total turnover. While accepting employment with state criminal justice agencies was the second most frequently reported type of criminal justice transfer, nearly three-fourths of the respondents noted that this type of transfer was not exerting a sizeable impact on their overall staff turnover. In other words, most detention facilities are losing officers to state agencies but these transfers only account for 30 percent or less of their total transfers. This fact holds true for transfers to same size agencies and transfers to smaller agencies as well. Despite the fact that almost half of the facilities lost officers to same size criminal justice agencies, and more than a third lost personnel to smaller departments, these transfers are not significant enough to drive a sizeable decline in detention facility turnover. Thus, the data suggest that transfers to larger criminal justice agencies account for the greatest percentage of all transfers on a statewide basis.

Other survey data validate the assumption that detention officers are leaving the employing agency all together versus transferring to another division such as road patrol. On the average only 21.6 percent of the detention officers, who leave the facility, are being reassigned to full time law enforcement status through intradepartmental transfers. This means that 78.4 percent of the statewide turnover is attributable to detention personnel completely exiting the agency to pursue employment elsewhere.

Overall, irrespective of the reasons why officers leave, the average length of an officer's employment is 21 months before he/she decides to leave the facility. Seventy-five percent of the agencies reported an average length of stay of two years or less. Thus, it appears that a critical period of two years exists in which detention facilities can implement policies and/or programs to improve retention rates and conversely minimize its attrition rate by retaining officers beyond a two-year period. The longest average length of stay was five years with two survey participants reporting this number as being indicative of how long the average detention officer stays within their agency.

As part of the survey a question was included which asked participants to state what percentage, of their detention officers, are also required to hold full-time sworn deputy sheriff status. Responses ranged from zero to 80 percent with 32 (78%) detention facilities not requiring any of their detention officers to also be sworn deputies. Across the entire survey sample only 3.7 percent of the detention officers also held sworn deputy status. This suggests that many Sheriffs' Offices are developing dual career tracks in which detention work is viewed as a separate, and equally respected, profession comparable to the law enforcement field.

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to freely express ideas for improving detention facility retention rates. Not surprisingly, the number one recommended method for improving retention revolved around the salary and benefits issue. However, quite a few varied responses were obtained with several innovative ideas being offered as to how

detention personnel can be retained through non-salary related means. Illustrative examples of both salary/benefits comments and non-salary related ideas are provided below:

- ☆ Pay increase-more staff-updated policies and procedures
- ☆ New facility- improved salary-additional employees
- ☆ 401-K same as regular officers
- ☆ Advanced training
- ☆ Better pay and on going programs for stress
- ☆ Increase in starting salary-Merit pay rises
- ☆ More manpower to cut down on stress. Better pay and benefits.
- ☆ Better salary-New jail-More employees
- ☆ Higher pay-More on-duty officers per shift-Better retirement.
- ☆ Set standards and policies in every day work-More training opportunities.
- ☆ Better pay-promotions-formal recognition- more advance training.

Survey participants were also encouraged to provide comments on any aspect of the recruitment and retention process that they thought would be of noteworthy importance to the training and standards commissions and the Governor's Crime Commission. The following comments were suggested or offered as issues that should be brought to the attention of the commissions.

- ➔ Increasing in-service training for detention officers would be an asset- classes held at various locations.
- ➔ Until basic salaries and incentives are adjusted to fair market values employees with detention officer duties will continue to turn over.
- ➔ Additional training courses need to be afforded to the officers.



- ➔ Better pay, better working conditions, new detention center.

### *Research Questions*

1. Do agencies with high attrition rates differ from agencies with low attrition rates in terms of how each group rates the effectiveness of their recruitment strategies?

*No*, Surprisingly, agency attrition rate has no significant bearing on how the respondents rated the effectiveness of each recruitment strategy. Agencies with low attrition rates are no more likely to report effective recruitment strategies than agencies with higher attrition rates. In other words for detention facilities effective recruitment strategies are not directly related to the extent to which an agency loses sworn personnel.

2. Do agencies with high attrition rates differ from agencies with low attrition rates in terms of how each group rates the effectiveness of their retention strategies?

*No*, ***The effectiveness ratings of the various retention strategies did not vary by agency attrition group. Agencies with low attrition rates are no more likely to report more effective retention strategies than agencies with high attrition rates. Thus it appears that the perceived effectiveness of retention techniques is not related to agency turnover.***

3. Do small and large agencies differ in terms of their perceived effectiveness ratings for recruitment techniques?

*Yes*, Large and small detention facilities do differ on the extent to which each rates the effectiveness of job fairs, and local personnel listings, as recruitment techniques. Larger agencies, employing more than the sample average of 53 full-time officers, are more likely to view job fairs as an effective recruitment technique. Respondents from smaller detention facilities rated the local personnel listings as being more effective for recruiting new officers compared to those respondents representing larger detention facilities.

4. Do small and large detention facilities differ significantly in their attrition rates?

*No*, While smaller agencies do have higher attrition rates, when compared to larger detention facilities, the difference in the two rates is not significant from a statistical standpoint. The average attrition rate for small agencies, 23.8%, is only slightly higher than the rate for larger facilities (18.2%).

5. Do small and large agencies differ in terms of their perceived effectiveness ratings for retention techniques?

*No*, Personnel from both small and large detention facilities reported comparable effectiveness ratings for the various retention techniques which were included in the study. Unlike the perceived effectiveness of recruitment techniques agency size has no discernible impact on the perceived effectiveness or usefulness of the retention strategies which the state's detention facilities use. What is perceived to be effective in smaller facilities is also perceived to be effective in larger facilities and vice-versa.

6. Are larger agencies more likely to hire applicants who have already completed the Basic Detention Officer Certification Course?

*No*, Surprisingly, respondents from the smaller detention facilities reported that a greater number of their officers had already completed the certification course prior to employment. The average percent, of detention officers completing the course prior to employment, was 25.8 percent in the small agencies versus 18.6 percent in the large detention facilities.

7. Are smaller agencies more likely to require their detention personnel to concurrently hold full-time sworn deputy sheriff status?

*No*, In fact, the percentage of detention officers, who are required to hold dual certification, is higher in the larger detention agencies. Within the small detention facilities less than one percent of the officers also held deputy status while in the larger agencies seven percent held both detention officer and sworn deputy status.

8. Are smaller agencies more likely to transfer detention personnel to full-time sworn law enforcement status?

**No,** There are no significant differences between large and small agencies in the percentage of officers who are transferred to full-time deputy status. Small agencies transfer 20.7 percent while the larger agencies transfer 20.1 percent.

9. Do agency turnover and vacancy rates vary by geographic region of the state?

**No,** Unlike the turnover and vacancy rates for sworn deputy positions, which do vary by region of the state, turnover and vacancy rates did not vary significantly for detention personnel on the basis of geographical region.

10. Do agencies with aggressive recruitment strategies differ from agencies with passive and neutral strategies in terms of their applicant pools, turnover rates and vacancy rates?

**No,** Detention facilities which are described as being more aggressive in their recruitment strategies do not appear to differ significantly from those facilities with passive or neutral strategies. Thus aggressive recruiting does not appear to significantly affect turnover or vacancy rates, nor does it have a significant relationship to the number of applicants on agency waiting lists.

11. Do agencies with larger applicant pools differ from agencies with low and non-existent applicant pools?

**Yes,** Agencies with four or more applicants on a waiting list have significantly more applicants per vacant position when compared to agencies with smaller waiting lists and agencies that do not have a backlog of applicants. Agencies with larger waiting lists rated the effectiveness of newspapers as being significantly lower when compared to agencies with smaller, and non-existent, backlogs. However, agencies with larger waiting lists rated job fairs as being substantially more effective than agencies with small or non-existent applicant backlogs. Respondents from agencies with small, or non-existent, backlogs were significantly more likely to perceive the provision of education/training at agency expense as a more effective retention technique. Responses, from agencies with larger waiting lists, indicated that providing education and training was not as effective for retaining officers when compared to agencies with small or no waiting lists.

**No,** The size of a facility's waiting list, or backlog of applicants, has no significant bearing on the percentage of detention officers who are employed prior to attending a Basic Detention Officer Certification Course. Agencies with larger waiting lists are no more likely to employ officers, before training, than agencies with small and non-existent

backlogs. The presence of a waiting list has no effect on whether officers are employed before or after completing the certification course.

12. Do recruitment techniques differ for sworn deputy personnel and detention facility personnel?

**Yes,** Effectiveness ratings were significantly different for two of the nine recruitment techniques which were included in the study. Data suggest that recruiting through the community colleges and using an existing auxiliary/reserve force are much more effective for deputies versus detention officers. Sheriffs' offices are significantly more likely to hire detention applicants, and then sponsor their training post employment, versus hiring sworn deputy personnel prior to the completion of BLET.

On the average 75 percent or more of the detention officers are hired before completing a basic certification course versus only 20 percent of sworn deputies.

**No,** The number of candidates on an agency waiting list did not vary by officer type with the average backlog of detention officers being nearly equal to the average number of people on deputy waiting lists. Likewise, the number of applicants per vacant position did not vary significantly between detention and deputy positions. The average number of applicants for sworn deputy positions was similar to the average number of applicants per vacant detention officer position.

13. Do attrition and retention differ between sworn deputy personnel and detention facility personnel?

**Yes, *Significant differences were found to exist between both turnover and vacancy rates by personnel type. Turnover rates for detention personnel were, on the average, nine percent higher than turnover rates for sworn deputies. Vacancy rates were, on the average, seven percent higher among detention personnel when contrasted with sworn deputy positions. The average length of stay, before terminating employment, differs significantly between the two job types with detention officers leaving an average of seven months earlier than sworn deputies who resign from the sheriffs' office.***

No, *The effectiveness of the various retention techniques did not vary significantly between sworn deputy and detention personnel. Effective techniques were perceived to have the same effect for retaining either sworn deputies or detention officers. What works for retaining sworn deputies also works for retaining detention officers. Lateral transfers to larger criminal justice agencies are exerting an equal, but still sizeable, impact on both detention and deputy attrition rates.*

### ***Discussion and Policy Implications/Recommendations***

It is extremely important to consider external events and the current economic situation, which criminal justice and detention agencies are experiencing, as a contextual framework when interpreting the results of the current study. The events of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terrorism, the current fiscal crisis and recession; as well as the situation in Iraq have, and will, impact recruitment and retention issues among the county detention facilities. Economic concerns and limitations may limit attrition as individual officers have fewer options to pursue outside of their current position, i.e. fewer available jobs for which the officers can apply. Conversely, more positions may be created as a response to homeland security issues and more vacant positions may open up in order to fill the void left by officers who have been activated to serve in the military reserves.

Despite the fact that most facilities are not experiencing significant long-term attrition problems and most have not noticed strong increases in their vacancy rates the average statewide attrition rate hovers at 21 percent while the statewide average vacancy rate is slightly higher than 12 percent. Nearly one-fourth of the facilities still noted that their respective turnover and vacancy rates have risen during the past three years. Also, over half of the respondents described their recruitment efforts as neutral, i.e. not aggressive nor passive.

Recommendation # 1

Detention facility recruitment efforts should be intensified, especially in those agencies which are experiencing significant growth in their attrition and vacancy rates. Intensifying recruitment efforts should also include the exploration of non-traditional recruitment techniques such as use of the Internet.

Respondents overwhelmingly mentioned salary issues as factors affecting both recruitment and retention within their agencies. Increasing the average starting salary may attract a better and larger applicant pool, however study findings suggest that the greater salary concern occurs after, and not before, the applicant is hired as a new officer. On the average officers are leaving the detention facility after 21 months of employment because of limited opportunities to receive an increase in their salaries. In other words they are still receiving the same compensation, or only a slight increase above, their original starting salaries. One in five officers leave the detention facility with the majority of these leaving for employment with larger criminal justice agencies.

Recommendation # 2

While agency budget restrictions are imposing significant hardships on detention facilities, and their ability to retain personnel, the research findings suggest that other retention techniques, beyond increasing salaries, may be promising and certainly less costly alternatives for retaining officers. County facilities, and state personnel who work in the detention certification, education and standards area, may wish to consider expanding the quantity and quality of in-service and advanced training which is currently offered to detention personnel. Formal award programs should also be expanded at both the local and state levels with the assignment of favorable work shifts being given serious consideration by detention facility directors as well.

The quality of applicants' prior criminal histories appears to be problematic with nearly 50 percent of the respondents noting this factor as a significant barrier to recruiting more qualified detention officers.

Recommendation # 3

More in-depth analysis should be conducted in this area in order to ascertain the nature and extent of applicants who have prior criminal histories. More research is needed to determine how many applicants have criminal records and the types of offenses for which they have been arrested and/or convicted. This research should include officer

decertification data as well. A possible solution could include requiring more intensive applicant screening prior to enrollment in certification courses although this would impact a limited number of agencies.