

NC Department of Public Safety

Survey Research Project Summary
October 2024



the project

What?

Online survey research to better understand the state of law enforcement recruitment and retention across North Carolina.

Why?

Current vacancy rates and lack of prospects/recruits has resulted in many understaffed agencies.

Who?

- + Law enforcement “leadership” (agency/department leads, recruiters, instructors)
- + Recent law enforcement recruits, trainees, graduates (BLET students over the last 3 years)
- + General prospects

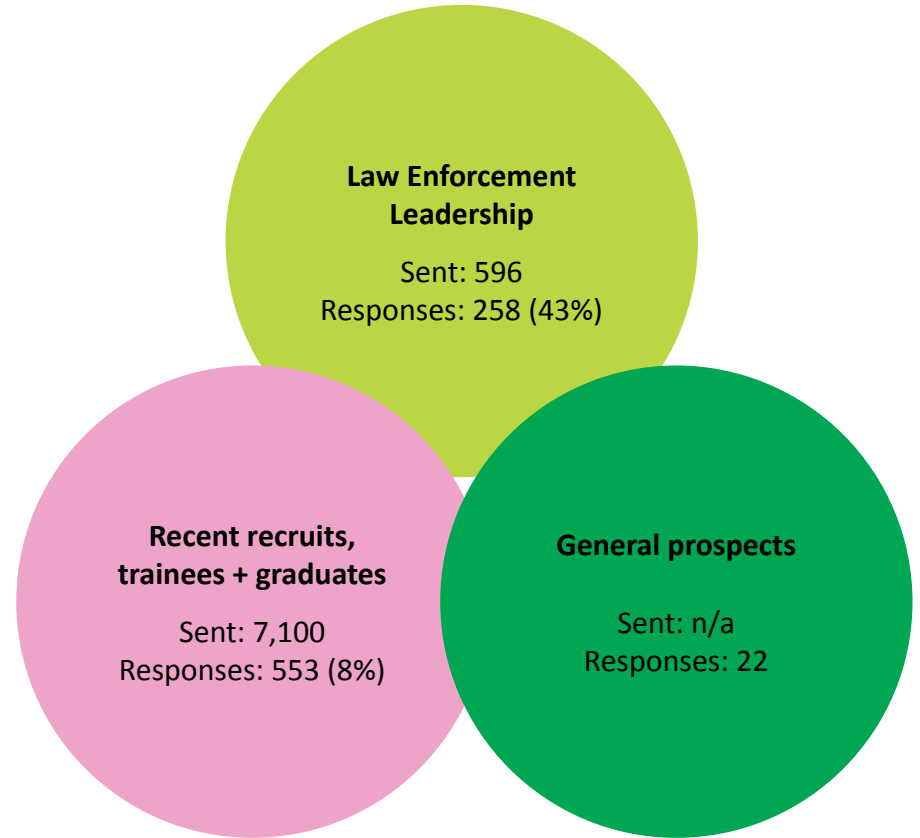
How/When?

SurveyMonkey links sent out by NCDPS between February - June 2024

respondent summary

Limitation:

- + “General prospects” group was not a significant sample size and had several inauthentic answer responses
- + BLET instructors in leadership group was not a significant sample size (only seven)



Leadership Survey Findings

**Police Chiefs, Sheriffs, BLET leadership,
State Agency leadership, Recruiters**



key highlights

leadership survey: demographics

- + The majority of respondents were:
 - + **Experiencing a decreasing number of recruits**
 - + Finding it more difficult to attract and retain recruits
 - + Experiencing vacancy rates of greater than 5%:
 - + 45% of agencies were experiencing vacancy rates of greater than 10%
 - + 23% of agencies were experiencing vacancy rates of greater than 20%
 - + Nearly equal urban vs. rural
 - + Experiencing population growth in their area
 - + In departments with 16-70 sworn officers

key highlights

leadership survey: high level

- + In market research, a question is typically asked about Net Promoter Score (NPS). NPS indicates how likely individuals are to recommend a service or product (or in this case, a career in law enforcement) to a friend or relative.
- + The scale this question is ranked on goes from -100 (would never recommend) to +100 (would always recommend).
- + The DPS Survey had a score of -33 for general leadership and -43 for BLET leaders **(meaning the vast majority were not very likely to recommend law enforcement as a career)**

Police1 2022 study results - The NPS for respondents with less than five years of experience was -42%, the best among the five age-based cohorts. The result for officers with 10-20 and 21-30 years of experience were -78% and -76% respectively.

key highlights

leadership survey: high level

- + The three top concerns they've heard from potential recruits about considering/pursuing a career were: **pay/benefits, work-life balance/mental health, and opportunities for advancement**
- + Respondents gave an average response of **5 out of 10** when asked about the effectiveness of their recruitment
- + The three most effective recruitment pipelines identified were: **BLET programs, networking/word of mouth, and non-sworn personnel looking to transition to a sworn role**

key highlights

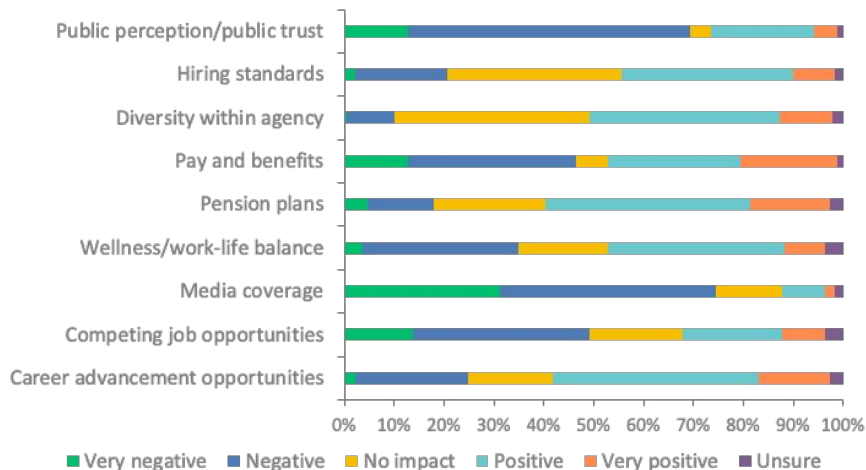
leadership survey: perception

Most negative:

- + Public Perception/Trust
- + Media Coverage
- + Pay and Benefits

Most positive:

- + Pension plans
- + Career advancement opportunities
- + Diversity within agency



“Indicate the impact each of these factors has on the perception that recruits have of a career in law enforcement.”

key highlights

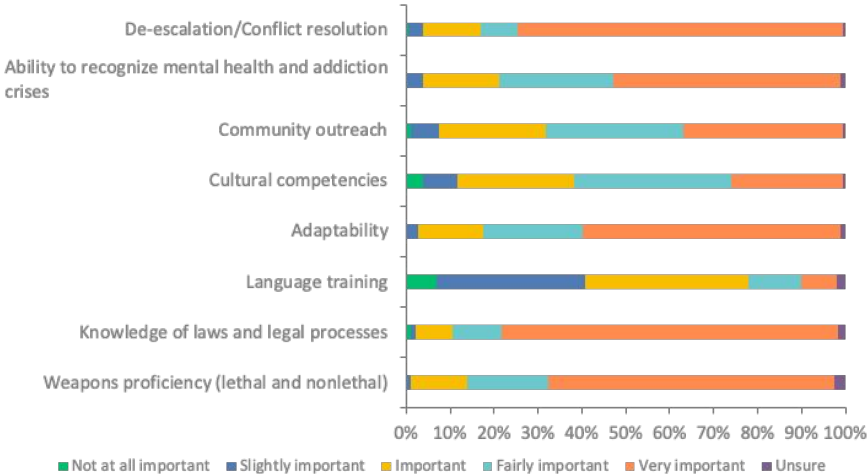
leadership survey: skills and competencies

Most important:

- + Knowledge of laws/legal processes
- + Weapons proficiency
- + Adaptability

Least important:

- + Language training
- + Cultural competencies
- + Community outreach

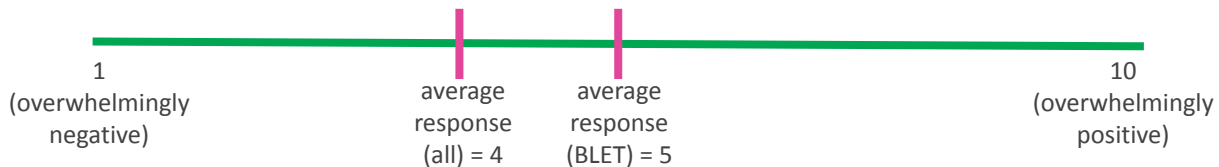


“How important are the following skills and competencies to the success of new recruits?”

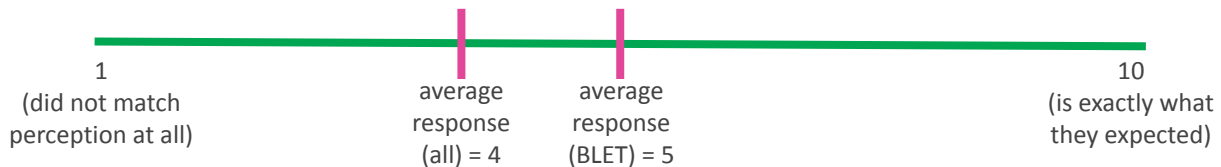
key highlights

leadership survey: media and experience

On a scale of 1-10, what impact has local media had on your recruitment efforts?



On a scale of 1-10, how closely does a recruit's vision of their job match their first-year reality?



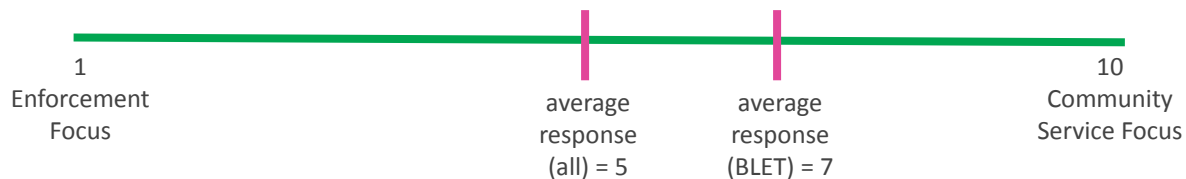
key highlights

leadership survey: community service focus

Which type of recruit best fits the needs of your community?



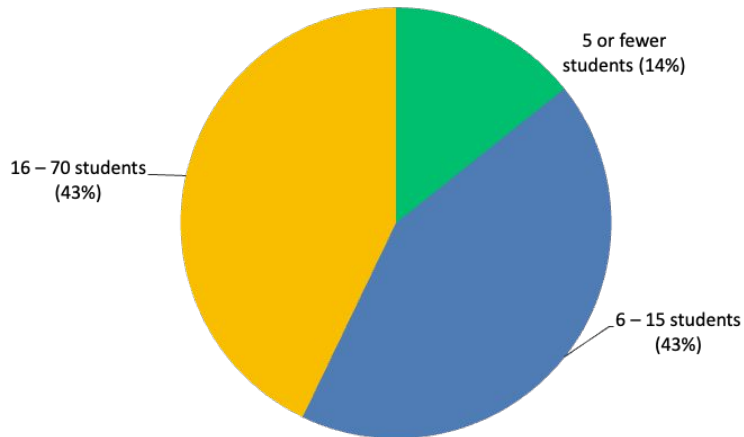
Where do most candidates who respond to your outreach fall?



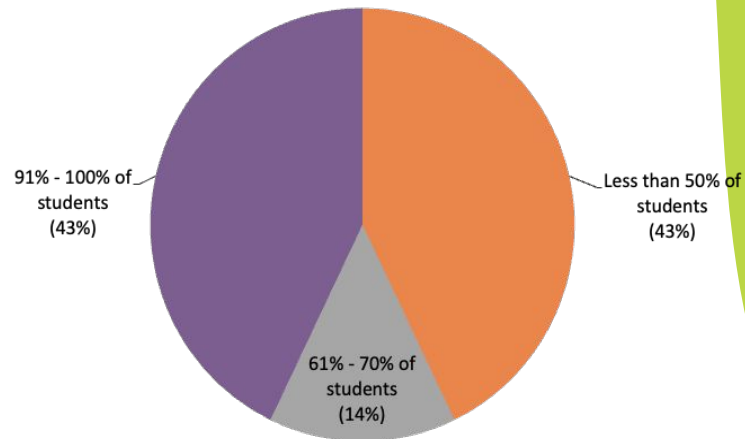
key highlights

BLET survey: BLET

Approximately how many students began your program last year?



Approximately how many students completed your program last year?



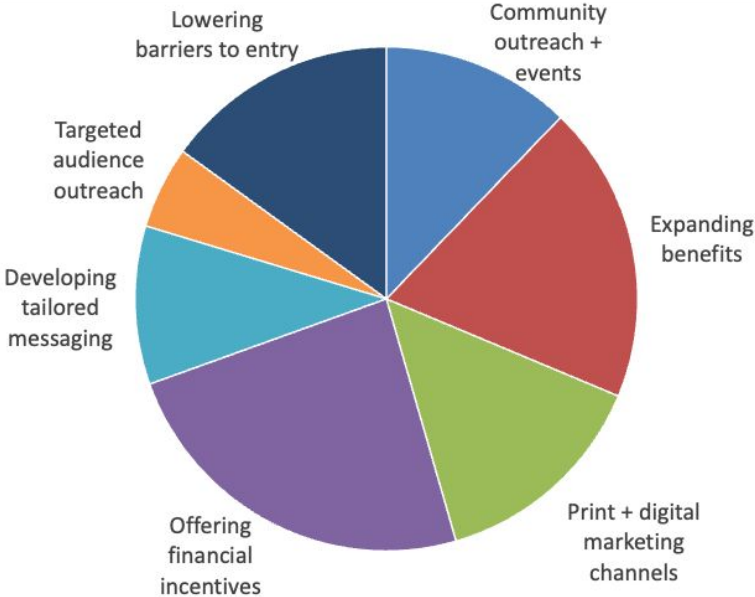
key highlights

BLET survey: high level findings

- + BLET leadership indicated seeing a **decrease in the number of annual enrollees in the last four years**
- + The main factors they see **negatively** impacting perception of the career by recruits were: **public perception, media coverage, and pension plans**
- + The main factors they see **positively** impacting perception of the career by recruits were: **career advancement opportunities and hiring standards**
- + The top concerns they heard from recruits about this career path were: **hiring standards/training, pay/benefits, and perception of the career from friends, family or the public**

key highlights

leadership survey: innovative recruitment



“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: innovative recruitment

Effective and/or innovative recruitment efforts cited for **Community Outreach + Events**:

- + In-person and virtual job fairs
- + Developing internship/apprenticeship programs
- + Promoting at high schools and colleges
- + Ride-along opportunities/open houses
- + Visiting military sites

“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: expanding benefits

Effective and/or innovative recruitment efforts cited for **Expanding Benefits:**

- + Incentives such as gym memberships (or on-site gyms), take home vehicles and expansion of range/distance for eligibility, mental healthcare, affordable housing, childcare reimbursement, tuition reimbursement, and free uniforms
- + Customized schedules and opportunities to earn permanent, fixed schedules
- + Promoting and actually having initiatives that offer real work-life balance
- + Advertising/explaining the career ladder and opportunities for advancement
- + Developing healthy culture and promoting family-oriented environments

“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: print/digital marketing

Effective and/or innovative recruitment efforts cited for **Print + Digital Marketing**

Channels:

- + Social media use and utilizing paid ads features
- + Videos
- + Signage on public transportation + recruitment vehicles/trailers
- + Radio ads
- + Billboards
- + Updated collateral

“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: financial incentives

Effective and/or innovative recruitment efforts cited for **Offering Financial Incentives:**

- + Paying for individuals to attend BLET (and sometimes pre-hiring with stipend/salary)
- + Hiring/signing bonuses
- + Retention bonuses
- + Salary increases that are clear from the beginning (and quicker to achieve)
- + Employee referral incentives

“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: tailored messaging

Effective and/or innovative recruitment efforts cited for **Developing Tailored Messaging**:

- + New culture of LE
- + One-on-one meetings with recruits/prospects to understand what motivates them; showing them how they could personally be a good fit
 - + “Coffee with a Cop” program
- + Emphasizing diversity and openness
- + Highlighting different aspects of job - boat/marine policing, use of technology
- + Messaging/talking points for family members
- + Focus on family-like atmosphere
- + Personal gratification that comes from the job

“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: targeted audiences

Effective and/or innovative recruitment efforts cited for **Targeted Audience Outreach**:

- + Converting non-sworn to sworn
- + Retirees from local government
- + Transfers
- + High schools, community colleges and Criminal Justice departments at universities
- + Military
- + HBCUs
- + Crossfit events

“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: barriers to entry

Effective and/or innovative recruitment efforts cited for **Lowering Barriers to Entry**:

- + Hiring or pre-hiring cadets while still at BLET/sending them to BLET (paying for BLET and/or salary while in BLET)
- + Shortening academy time and trainings
- + Removing/lessening facial hair, tattoo and piercing rules
- + For transfers, honoring pay/vacation tiers based on longevity in profession
- + Incentives during training

“What effective or innovative recruitment efforts are you trying?”

key highlights

leadership survey: public trust

- + Respondents gave many responses that point to clear **challenges with public trust and perception:**
 - + **Public trust in law enforcement has significantly diminished** due to negative media portrayals and high-profile incidents involving police misconduct.
 - + **Public trust is crucial for effective policing**, and the lack of it creates a challenging environment for officers and new recruits.
 - + Many potential candidates are discouraged from joining the force due to **fears of public hostility, scrutiny, and lack of community support.**

“Is there anything else you’d like to share?”

“The overall respect and honor of the job has changed.”

“I think it would also be great to have more public relations LEOs that consistently travel to High Schools, Middle Schools, etc. and put on events for the youth throughout the state. It would be a great long-term investment, and the kids would grow up seeing a LEO in a good way instead of only associating us with something bad.”

key highlights

leadership survey: recruits/prospects

- + Respondents gave many responses that point to clear **challenges with recruits and prospects**:
 - + Difficulty in attracting young people to careers in law enforcement due to a combination of **societal changes, negative public perception, and the allure of alternative careers that offer better pay and work-life balance.**
 - + Perception that the overall quality of new recruits has diminished. Current candidates often **lack the necessary dedication, resilience, and passion for law enforcement, compared to previous generations.**
 - + Respondents indicate that law enforcement struggles to **compete with itself** and with industries that provide **better salaries, benefits, and career advancement prospects.**

“Is there anything else you’d like to share?”

“New recruits today lack the drive and desire to take a stand and make a difference. They are not in it for the long-haul. They jump from job to job as opposed to their predecessors, who made a career of this chosen profession. Some are meant to be the Police, others are meant to call the Police.”

“It is a difficult time in recruiting young people into the field. The expectations have shifted from what they can do for their community to what can the department do for them.”

“Agency name recognition has a tremendous impact on recruitment. This leaves smaller agencies unable to recruit quality candidates, regardless of what benefits the smaller agency provides. This leaves smaller agencies with the ability to only hire candidates who would not have been hired 10 years ago.”

key highlights

leadership survey: training and cert.

- + Respondents gave many responses that point to clear **challenges with training and certification processes**:
 - + There is a strong call for reforming the certification/training processes to make them more efficient. Respondents say that the current processes are **too slow and bureaucratic**, leading to delays in getting recruits operational.

“Is there anything else you’d like to share?”

“Training and Standards needs more employees to process certification needs. We are waiting too long before they can be sworn in and start the FTO program and this frustrates officers that have completed BLET.”

“Finding recruits and/or cadets is hard enough. The backgrounds are a painstaking process now, especially for laterals. A five to seven-week approval from NC Training and Standards is completely outrageous. We have someone who was hired in August and sent through BLET. When he graduated in December, I had everything ready to go. It has now been six weeks and nothing. We are a six-man department and are down two positions. We need actual changes in this area of review, not promises to fix it.”

key highlights

leadership survey: retention

- + Respondents gave many responses that point to clear **challenges with retention efforts**:
 - + Better incentives are needed to retain officers. Need: **competitive salaries, retirement benefits, and lessen the 30-year retirement requirement.**
 - + Respondents indicated **lack of concern to retention** was a big issue.
 - + Improving the internal work environment is also highlighted. Improved motivations to retain officers like **schedules, pay, leadership issues, administrators not understanding officer's risk/stress, morale, backstabbing, etc.**

“Is there anything else you’d like to share?”

“Municipalities need to start thinking proactively about recruiting while not forgetting the employees that have been in the career field for five, ten, twenty years. There is a lot of knowledge and experience with tenure employees.”

“If administrators and supervisors continue to display a noted division, lack of understanding, failure to provide recognition, and lack of genuine support of the officers that “make or break” the department (ie patrol), you will continue to have morale and retention issues even if you can recruit.”

“Retention is just as important as recruitment. I've heard a lot of people being disgruntled about the job they do and are ready to jump ship and do something else because of schedule, money, leadership, etc. ...the amount of people I've had to listen to that talk about leaving this job over the past year or two has become alarming.”

Recent Recruit Survey Findings

**Individuals who completed training to
become a sworn officer in the last
three years**



key highlights

recent recruit survey: demographics

- + 93% of respondents had completed training to become a sworn officer in the last three years and were currently serving as a sworn officer
 - + Remaining 7% either never served in this role or served as an officer but then moved to another career
- + The majority of respondents worked at a police agency (60%), followed by Sheriff's Office (30%), and State Agency (10%)
- + 55% of respondents worked at an urban agency; 45% rural
- + The largest age range of recent recruits was 18 - 25 (53%), followed by 25 - 35 (26%)
- + 81% male; 18% female; 1% other
- + 69% White; 16% Black; 9% Hispanic
- + 31% had a Bachelor's degree; 28% had some college credit or no degree; 16% had a high school diploma or GED; 15% had an Associates degree

key highlights

recent recruit survey: high level

- + The primary industries people came to LE from were: **military, retail, students, healthcare (including EMS), construction and skilled trades, corrections, and security**
- + 53% began considering/pursuing a career in LE between **ages 18 - 25** followed by 26% from ages **26 - 35**
- + 53% cited **family and friends as the most influential people** in their decision to pursue a career in LE; only 15% were influenced by a local officer or recruiter
 - + 24% of respondents answered “Other” - the majority of the open-ended responses cited “myself” as the key influencer or just the desire to good and serve their community.
 - + Many of these responses also including **TV shows and fictional characters as their influence**

key highlights

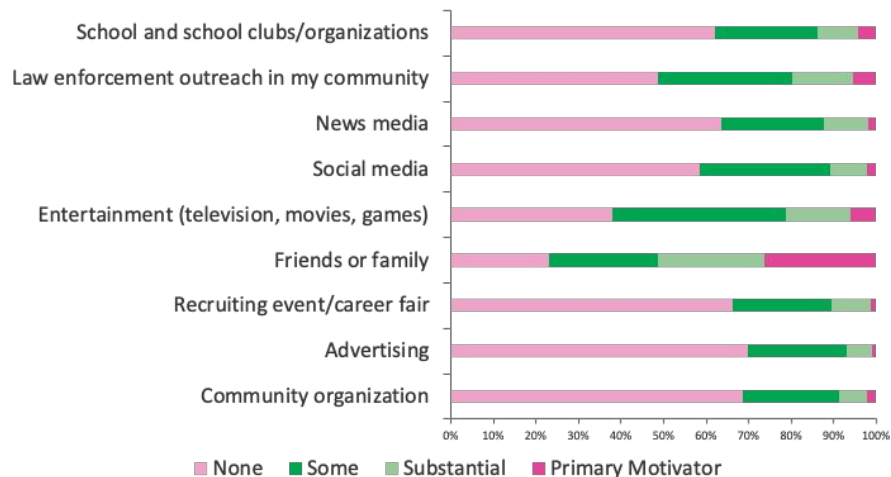
recent recruit survey: influence

Most influence:

- + Friends or family
- + Entertainment
- + Law enforcement outreach

Least influence:

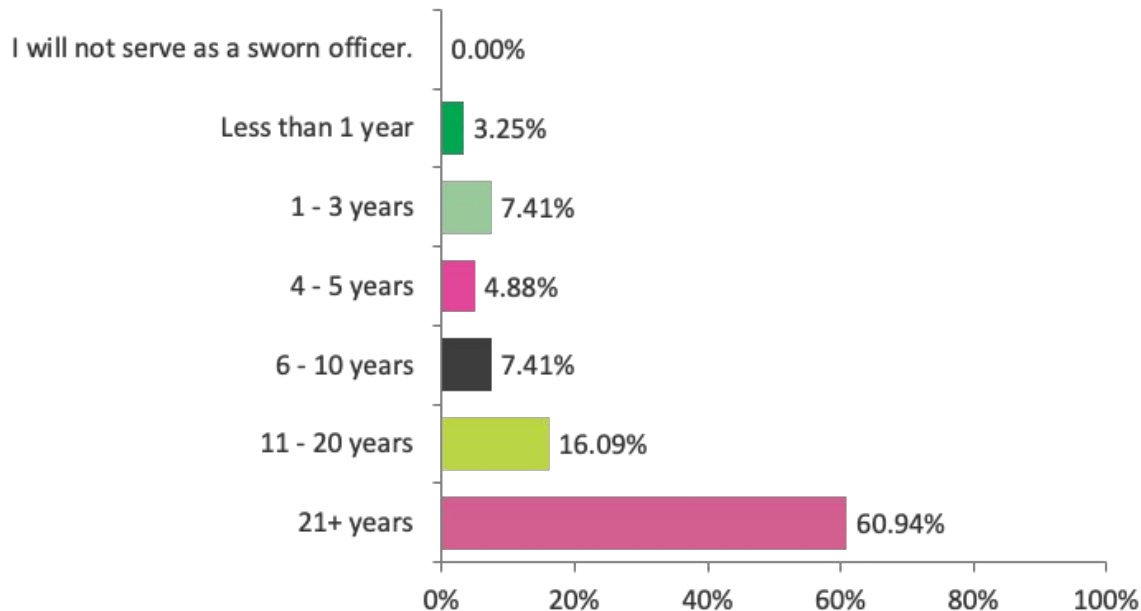
- + Advertising
- + Community organizations
- + Recruiting event/career fair



“To what degree did these influence your decision to pursue a career in law enforcement?”

key highlights

recent recruit survey: longevity



“How long did you serve or how long do you expect to serve as an officer?”

key highlights

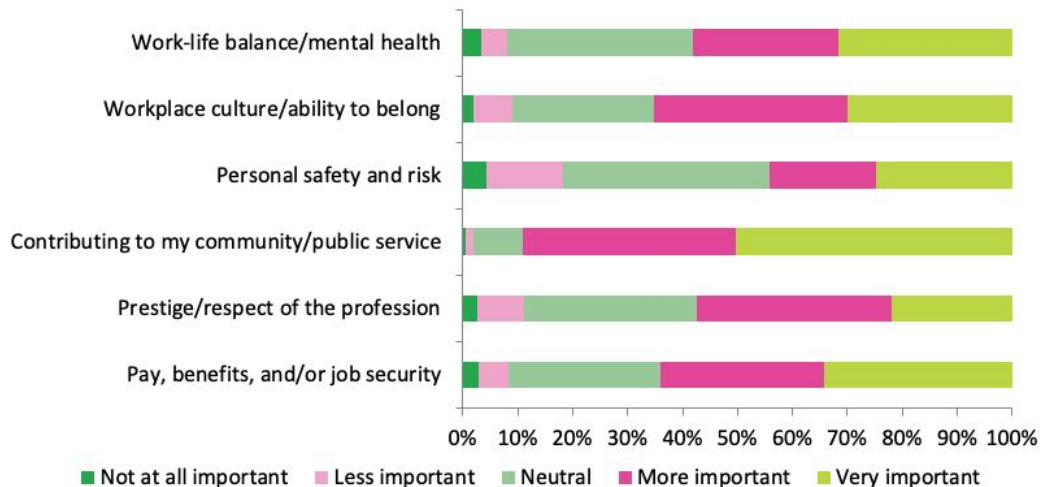
recent recruit survey: decision factors

Most important:

- + Contributing to community
- + Workplace culture/belonging
- + Pay, benefits, and/or job security

Least important:

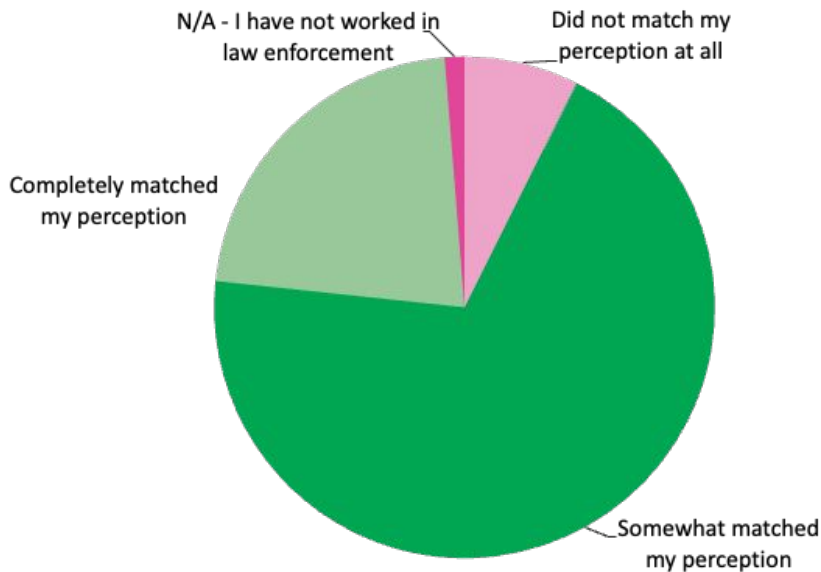
- + Personal safety/risk
- + Prestige/respect of profession
- + Workplace culture/belonging



“Rate the impact of these factors on your decision to build a career in law enforcement.”

key highlights

recent recruit survey: vision

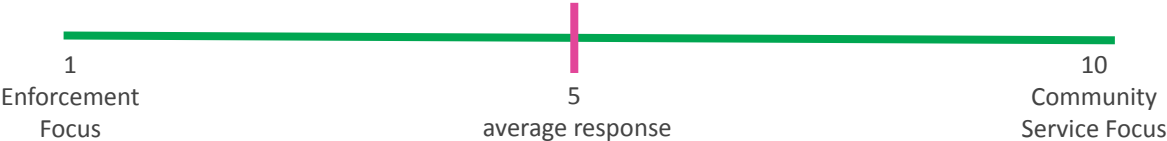


“How did your vision of joining law enforcement match the reality of your day-to-day work?”

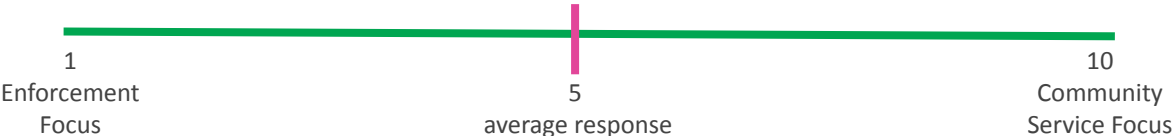
key highlights

recent recruit survey: mindset

Which type of mindset best fits the needs of today's law enforcement?



Where would you place yourself on this same spectrum?



key findings

recent recruit survey - open-ended feedback

- + Question: “Is there anything else you’d like to share?”
 - **Work-life balance and mental health** need significant improvement
 - A need for **more relevant and realistic BLET curriculum/programs**
 - **Hostility, discrimination, and unhealthy workplace culture** were cited frequently
 - **Better pay, insurance, and other benefits**
 - Processes for **training/standards/backgrounds** are outdated and long

General Prospect Survey Findings

In-person surveys at job fairs/events



key highlights

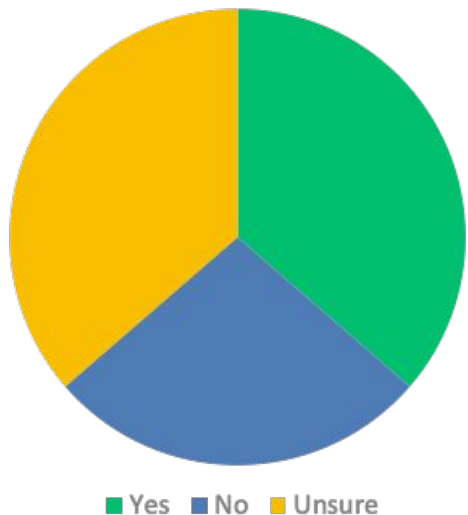
general prospects survey: demographics

- + 77% of respondents were under the age of 18
 - + 14% were 18 - 22
 - + 9% were 31 - 40
- + 55% were male
- + 45% were Hispanic; 32% White; 14% Black

This survey group had extreme limitations - limited # of responses and a few respondents who did not take the survey seriously (mostly those aged 14 - 17)

key highlights

general prospects survey: skills

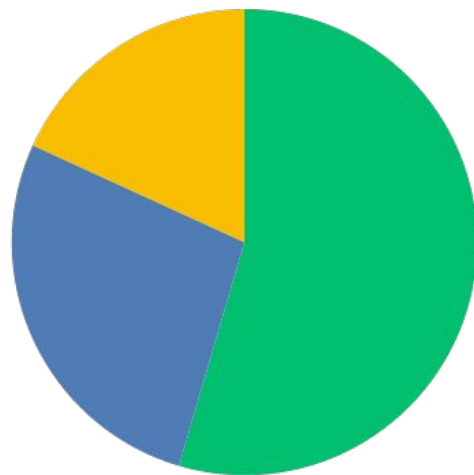


“Do you believe your skills would apply to a career in law enforcement?”

This survey group had extreme limitations - limited # of responses and a few respondents who did not take the survey seriously (mostly those aged 14 - 17)

key highlights

general prospects survey: career



■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure

“Have you considered a career in law enforcement?”

This survey group had extreme limitations - limited # of responses and a few respondents who did not take the survey seriously (mostly those aged 14 - 17)

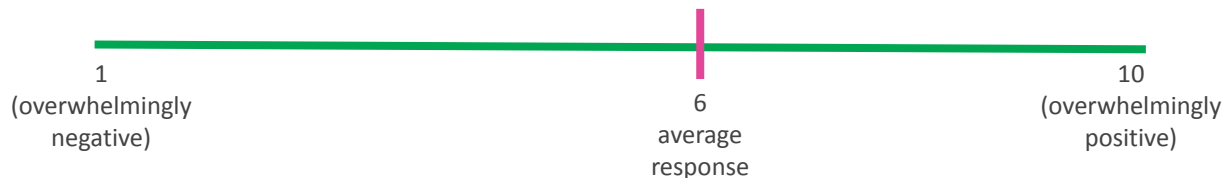
key highlights

general prospect survey: career interest

On a scale of 1-10, how interested would you be in exploring a career in law enforcement?

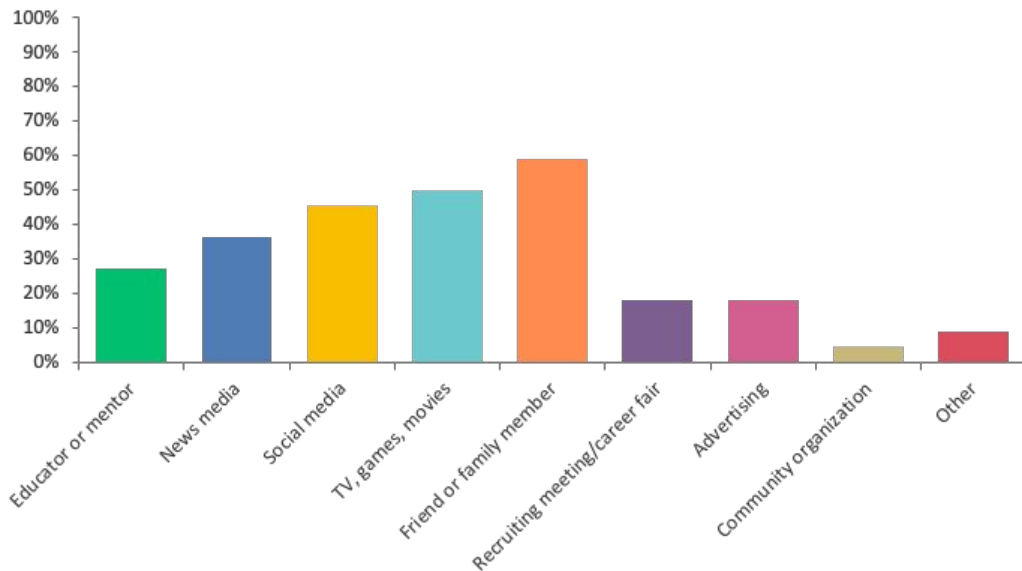


On a scale of 1-10, what impact has the media had in considering a career in law enforcement?



key highlights

general prospects survey: perception

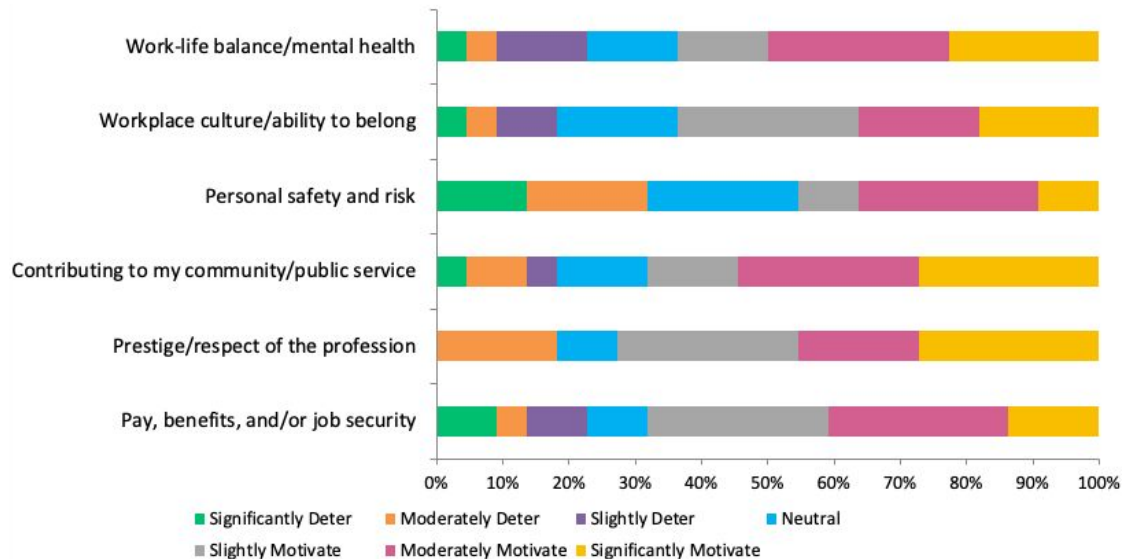


This survey group had extreme limitations - limited # of responses and a few respondents who did not take the survey seriously (mostly those aged 14 - 17)

“Which influences have most impacted your perception of a career in law enforcement?”

key highlights

general prospects survey: motivation



“How would these factors deter or motivate you to explore a career in law enforcement?”

This survey group had extreme limitations - limited # of responses and a few respondents who did not take the survey seriously (mostly those aged 14 - 17)

key highlights

general prospects survey: motivation

General sentiments included:

- + Being able to help people and serve the community
- + De-escalate situations and dealing with crises
- + Money
- + Physical abilities
- + Being in the field
- + Catching bad people
- + Being in a leadership or problem-solving role

“What might entice a person to consider a career in law enforcement?”

This survey group had extreme limitations - limited # of responses and a few respondents who did not take the survey seriously (mostly those aged 14 - 17)

key highlights

general prospects survey: perception

General sentiments included:

- + Motivated by the opportunity to keep people/communities safe
- + Prior family involvement with law enforcement inspired them
- + Gratitude for law enforcement
- + Like what they see officers do on TV

**“Please share
other thoughts
you have about
careers in law
enforcement.”**

This survey group had extreme limitations - limited # of responses and a few respondents who did not take the survey seriously (mostly those aged 14 - 17)

GCC Presentation

Feedback from leadership



key highlights

feedback from GCC leadership

Those present had many thoughts about **retention**. Feedback included:

- + Must bring back a robust benefits package
 - + Texas Highway Patrol has proven this theory
 - + Historically, although not the same industry, the supply of teachers was steady, even though they are underpaid, because of the benefits package --> could be the same with law enforcement
- + Retention gap has always been an issue for law enforcement; the data today is not much different than the data historically
- + Some people felt **more** focus should be placed on retention than recruitment; retention is cheaper (when longevity pay ended, people left - "what we're spending on sign-on bonuses, we used to spend on longevity pay, and that helped create leverage/incentive to stick around." --> need to go back to this model)

key highlights

feedback from GCC leadership

Those present had many thoughts about **leadership** and **divisiveness**. Feedback included:

- + They see the disconnect between more seasoned leaders and newer recruits. A “disconnect” comparison was made between public school teachers and their school district central offices (two very different worlds **both** critical to overall bigger-picture success)
 - + They expressed a desire and need to build a bridge of communication/appreciation for the value each “side” brings
- + They feel leadership has to abide by the administrative rules and regulations that govern them - these are currently very authoritative; until those change at a policy level (not a short-term solution), there's not much anyone can do to change management style/workplace culture

key highlights

feedback from GCC leadership

Other feedback included:

- + It's the little things that are moving the needle for NC State University Police (they have a waitlist for employment); it's critical to listen and ask what they want/value (don't assume you know); providing a fixed schedule has helped
- + Reciprocity across state lines is an unnecessary restrictive barrier (i.e., officers coming from VA to NC cannot transfer without training and education requirements but officers coming from NC to VA can – NC is making it too hard)
 - + There are some updates in progress for this

key highlights

feedback from GCC leadership

Other feedback included:

- + NC makes it very difficult to transition between departments; some states are unified with one universal category of law enforcement (so transitioning fluid)
- + Gym memberships as a potential benefit are under-utilized
- + Criminal Justice Commission is taking less than 14 days to turn around transition requests if the packet is submitted correctly (addresses lengthy time to hire that some people addressed in their survey responses)

Recommendations



addressing internal discontent

- 1. Ideate better incentives to retain officers.** With such focus on recruitment, it's easy for those in the field to feel ignored and underappreciated. Could include:
 - a. Financial – bonuses, appreciation checks, salary increases, lowering length of tenure to retirement/pension eligibility, etc.
 - b. In-kind – fixed schedules, employee recognitions, gym memberships, food, uniforms, changing take-home vehicle distances, etc.
- 2. Ideate workplace culture-building or team-building initiatives.** Many respondents cited a culture of backstabbing, low morale, divide between administrators and officers and divide between officers with different lengths of tenure.
- 3. Develop a committee that will dedicate time to #s 1 and 2 above.** This should be an ad-hoc committee with people from various roles and tenures.
- 4. Provide generational diversity training.** This could help address many of the concerning comments made about the generation of younger people coming into the field.

Your net promoter scores of -33 and -43 indicate that the vast majority of law enforcement leadership are NOT willing to recommend this career to a friend or relative. If your own people aren't promoting the career, this points to challenges that need to be addressed internally.

marketing/communications/PR recommendations

While many respondents offered helpful ideas, strategies and tactics, many of them cannot be solved through marketing and communications methods. They will need to be addressed within law enforcement itself (pay, benefits, training requirements, etc.).

1. **Continue research** to track trends, improvements, movement, perception, etc. and foster a feedback loop for NC LE professionals
2. **Develop clear, compelling, segmented messaging** to leverage the strengths and address the challenges of recruiting LE professionals in NC
3. **Build strategy and content directed at influencing the influencers**, especially those impacting women and BIPOC audiences
4. **Create targeted materials, content, advertising and communications** for use by local and state agencies to improve their recruiting effectiveness
5. **Train recruitment officers and PIOs** in use and activation of materials



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