White Paper: Hiring and Retention Practices in North Carolina Criminal Justice Agencies

Prepared by: The North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission, Planning and Standards Committee

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The successful hiring and retention of employees is an ongoing issue with many agencies in the criminal justice system. Recognizing this, in 2007 The North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission established the goal of assisting criminal justice agencies to address these issues.

This white paper is completed by the Commission's Planning and Standards Committee and its staff in pursuit of that goal. It is comprised of three sections. The first section addresses practices for attracting and retaining quality employees, and it grew out of surveys conducted in six North Carolina Criminal Justice Agencies identified as leaders in these areas. Section two is a brief review of an emerging psychological concept, emotional intelligence, which has applicability in criminal justice system hiring. Section three is a snapshot of current recruitment and retention information gathered from North Carolina criminal justice agencies in 2008.

Section 1: Best Practices in Recruitment and Retention

In early 2009, six* North Carolina Criminal Justice Agencies identified as having success in attracting and retaining quality employees were surveyed about "best practices" in hiring and retaining quality employees. Four surveys were sent to each agency. Survey one was geared toward newly hired employees to determine why they chose to work at a specific agency. Survey two asked employees with three to five years of experience what the agencies had done to make their employment a positive experience. Survey three asked the agencies about specific agency policies and efforts at increasing retention. Survey four gathered information about the hiring practices of the agencies.

Why Officers Choose an Agency: Survey 1

Six agency employees answered survey one. Their average length of service with the various agencies was six months. The focus of the survey was why these candidates chose employment with a particular agency.

- When asked how they learned of the opening with the agency, the respondents cited department websites, recruitment presentations and personal inquiry to an equal degree. This illustrates the benefits of a web presence.
- When asked what factors were important in their decision to seek employment with the agency, four respondents replied "location," two responded "the opportunity for growth and training," and two replied the "work environment of the department and the positive attitudes of current employees of the agency." This points out the benefit of stressing to the applicants the positive aspects of not only the agency, but the quality of life in the area as well.
- Four of the six respondents indicated they had considered employment with other agencies. When asked why they chose to work at their current agency they mentioned two variables. One was pay and the other was the interest shown and the repeated contact by the agency they ultimately chose to join. New employees mentioned that they appreciated frequent contact from agencies regarding the status of their application.
- When asked what suggestions they had for agencies to attract and hire officers, most mentioned encouraging applicants to interact with current agency employees through activities such as ridealongs. Several respondents also suggested stressing pay, benefits, and training opportunities to applicants.

Why Officers Stay with an Agency: Survey 2

Six employees responded to survey two. Their average length of service was 3.5 years. The focus of this survey was to determine what positive steps agencies had taken to enhance loyalty to the agency and increased job satisfaction.

- When asked what specific agency attributes were most important to their level of job satisfaction, training opportunities were mentioned by four of the respondents. Other attributes mentioned by the group were benefits, agency emphasis on meeting employee needs, fairly administered opportunities for advancement, competitive salary, good equipment and relationships with co-workers.
- Further input on satisfaction focused on several specific issues. Salary, good equipment and benefits were all deemed "very important" or "important" to job satisfaction. Also important were organizational factors such as well-defined chain of command (which is followed), no political influence on the agency, and freedom from micro-management.
- The respondents also suggested several organizational tactics to retain quality employees in addition to those listed above. These ideas include listening to employees' ideas and soliciting solutions, issuing take home cars, and stressing both formal and informal employee recognition.

What Agencies do to Promote Retention: Survey 3

Six agency heads or high ranking officers responded to survey three, which asked about practices that result in high levels of employee retention.

- When asked if their department had a formal retention program, no agency surveyed had such a plan. However, many informal practices were identified which result in high retention rates.
- Several of the respondents stressed the importance of measuring and tracking turnover rates in the belief that agencies can't very well address issues without information.
- Virtually all of the respondents tied retention to hiring. Four used the phrase "good fit" when discussing new hires. They saw a definite link between hiring quality employees with later retention. Also mentioned was the necessity of nurturing new employees and helping them adapt to their new job.
- There was a great deal of discussion concerning the culture of the organization. Several respondents mentioned the need to maintain a positive work environment. Components of such an environment include:
 - Regular (formal and informal) interaction between all levels of the organization.
 - Conduct transfers and promotions in a fair manner.
 - Listen to employees and involve them in decision-making.
 - Give employees responsibilities commensurate with their experience and skill level.
 - Provide employees the opportunity to engage in specialized activities such as bike patrol, SWAT, or the field training program.
 - Provide training opportunities to employees.
 - Unflinching self-examination of the agency and a willingness to address issues.
- Regarding other variables which are important to retention, salary was considered very important by most of the respondents, as was good equipment. Several of the respondents mentioned benefits as

having an increased role in retention. The economic slow down has impacted the health insurance coverage of employees' spouses and several agencies have experienced turnover due to other employers having better benefit packages.

What Particular Hiring Practices do Successful Agencies Use: Survey 4

All six agencies responded to survey four. This survey asked about steps used in the hiring process and their importance, as well as the agencies' sense of what attributes are consistently found in the highest quality applicants.

- When asked what attributes the agencies looked for in the hiring process, virtually all respondents mentioned honesty and integrity. Also mentioned were traits which demonstrate emotional intelligence such as maturity, communication skills, and good judgment. An expressed desire to help people, intelligence, creativity, optimism, understanding of the position, and a strong work ethic were also attributes sought in a candidate.
- The components of the hiring processes were similar among agencies and followed the requirements of the state. One agency (NC State University Police) incorporates emotional intelligence testing, and several agencies include interviews with the agency head.
- The respondents were asked what components of the process they thought was most useful in hiring quality candidates. One respondent indicated that no single component was most important; rather the agency strives for many points of view of the applicant. Several agencies mentioned recruiting as being very important, stating that processing applicants doesn't mean much without quality applicants. According to several respondents, interaction with current employees is a key component of the process. Finally, one agency focused on initial interviews with applicants. Not only is it an opportunity to screen out undesirable applicants, it's also an opportunity to "sell" the agency to quality applicants. Interviews are conducted in a positive fashion, and departmental goals are expressed and reinforced even at this early stage.
- On average, these agencies take eight weeks to hire an applicant. The times range from a high of twelve weeks to a low of four weeks. All agencies said they contact every applicant a minimum of once a week and believe this frequent contact is important to the applicants.
- When asked what seems to work best in hiring quality applicants, agencies mentioned recruitment that presents the agency and the area in which it is located in a positive manner. Several mentioned positive interaction with current agency employees and stressed the positive reputation of the agency. Respondents also mentioned taking time with applicants, making them feel valued. Finally, one agency expressed they strive to hire applicants who "wow" them through the process, not applicants who just squeak through.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence as a Component of Hiring

Since the mid 1990s, there has been an emerging concept in the area of psychology called emotional intelligence (EI). Salovey and Mayer defined EI as "The ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's thinking and actions." (Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D., 1994, "Emotional Intelligence"). Measuring an applicant's intelligence quotient (IQ) is common in police hiring processes, however, studies suggest emotional intelligence is a better predictor of successful life skills than IQ, particularly in the area of leadership abilities, where according to Goleman (What Makes a Leader?, 1998), EI matters twice as much for leadership abilities versus technical skills and cognitive ability.

Components of EI include:

- Self-Awareness knowing how you are perceived by others, how your behavior affects others.
- Self-Regulation think before acting, and acting appropriately.
- Motivation passion to work, to pursue goals with energy and persistence.
- Empathy ability to understand emotional makeup of other people, treat people according to their emotional reaction. Example: Use of force explain to arrestee why you had to do what you did.
- Social Skills manage relationships and build networks, find common ground and build rapport.

Generally, EI looks at how well a person is in touch with their own feelings and can accurately identify why they are experiencing emotions. EI is not about becoming emotionally detached; it is about becoming emotionally mature and confident. It also includes the ability to accurately recognize the emotions of others and examines how well a person uses the combination of those observations to effectively manage interpersonal interaction. These skills are important to success in working in all areas of the criminal justice system.

In October, 2006, The *Police Chief Magazine* published an article by Gregory Saville entitled "Emotional Intelligence in Policing." Saville states that "An officer's emotional intelligence – whether the lack of emotional awareness of the inability to control emotions – will emerge. There can be no escaping one's emotions; indeed, if repressed, they cause even more problems. This is of particular concern to law enforcement, due to the myth that an officer should grin and bear emotional crises and shake them off at the end of the shift." Saville believes that emotional intelligence is crucial to success as a police officer.

Paying attention to emotional intelligence represents a significant step for police training, leadership, and recruiting and hiring. It is a new concept, so implementation will be gradual. But hiring and keeping the next generation of police officers will likely require considering EI.

Several agencies in North Carolina incorporate tests of emotional intelligence in the hiring process. While the tests for this trait are still evolving, criminal justice agencies should explore testing in this area and consider including it as a component of the hiring processes.

<u>Section 3: 2008 Survey Information about Recruitment and Retention from</u> North Carolina Criminal Justice Agencies

The Planning and Standards Committee of the *North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission* conducted a survey in April 2008 to identify trends in law enforcement recruitment and retention. This was a follow-up to a 2001 survey. Two hundred and fifty state and local government agencies in North Carolina were polled in the survey, and ninety-one responded. Here are some highlights from the report.

Salary and Education

- In 2008, average law enforcement entry-level salary across surveyed agencies was \$26,000-\$30,000. That was up from \$20,000-\$25,000 in 2001. The smallest agencies (1-10 officers) tend to have the lowest entry-level salary; 40% start at \$20,000-\$25,000. Agencies with 100 or more officers have a higher average starting salary than agencies with fewer officers. (Page 1).
- The baseline education for entry as a law enforcement officer continues to be a high school diploma 77% of reporting agencies have this as the entry requirement. (Page 2).
- Most agencies provide a higher salary for prior law enforcement experience, and just over a third of agencies provide a higher starting salary for college degrees. (Page 16).

• Most agencies do not require a college degree for promotion to any rank. Among larger agencies, there are more education requirements related to promotion to lieutenant and higher leadership positions. (Pages 18-20).

Recruiting

- The top seven 2008 obstacles to recruiting, in order of most reported, are:
 - (1) Competition with other criminal justice agencies
 - (2) Budget restrictions
 - (3) Agency size (usually, meaning small relative to other agencies)
 - (4) Lack of fringe benefits
 - (5) Criminal history of applicants
 - (6) Competition with the private sector
 - (7) Cost of living in the agency's community
- Between 2001 and 2008, the number of agencies reporting "agency size" as a top obstacle decreased. It was (1) on the list in 2001. It is listed as an obstacle only by agencies with fewer than 50 officers. "Criminal history of applicants" moved up from (6) to (5) on the list. Obstacles (1) and (2) are listed as significant by agencies of all sizes. (Pages 5, 6).
- Most agencies (63%) describe their recruitment strategy as neutral to passive, while 37% describe their strategies as aggressive to strongly aggressive. (Page 7).
- Among recruiting techniques, "word of mouth" and "community college" were viewed most favorably by agencies. Comparatively, "job fairs" and "radio/ TV" were not viewed as effective as other strategies. (Page 8).

Turnover, Retention, and Attrition

- Agencies do not report a significant change in turnover and vacancy rates between 2001 and 2008. (Page 3).
- Retention techniques rated as most effective are "annual pay increases," "job related training," and "annual merit increases." "Job related training" was among the top three retention techniques for every size of agency. (Page 10).
- The most frequently cited reasons for attrition of officers in the survey were:
 - (1) Other law enforcement agency
 - (2) Budget
 - (3) Agency size
 - (4) Cost of living
 - (5) Retirement
 - (6) Lack of fringe benefits
 - (7) Agency location
 - (8) Private sector
 - (9) Unrealistic expectations
 - (10) Residency
 - (11) Criminal history of applicants
- "Budget" made the list of the top three contributing factors to attrition in every agency size. (Page 12).
- Across agency sizes, the highest attrition rates are in the range when an officer has worked 11-20 months (22%) for the agency, then 31-40 months (19.8%), and then 21-30 months (17.6%). (Page 14).

Summary:

Recruitment and retention of professional criminal justice officers is a continuing challenge for criminal justice agencies. The purpose of this project is to conduct research on recruitment and retention practices within the criminal justice profession and to provide examples of successful strategies which may be used by agencies statewide. The Commission hopes that information provided in this paper is helpful to that end.

^{*}Concord Police Department, Gaston County Police Department, Boone Police Department, North Carolina State University Police Department, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, and Lanesboro Correctional Facility