



What Works – Ideas from the Field

Ideas are presented here provided by jails that have worked to improve recruitment and retention. If you have ideas to include, email susanmccampbell@cipp.org

- York County, South Carolina
- Collin County, Texas
- Davidson County, Tennessee
- More Ideas and Strategies

Agency: Detention Division, York County Sheriff's Office, York, South Carolina

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Description of Initiative – Outreach and Expedited Hiring

The Detention Division, Office of Professional Standards, hosted two “Open Interview Events” in the summer of 2022 at the York County Sheriff's Office Law Enforcement Training Center. The goal was to streamline the hiring process. The recruiters spent the prior month heavily advertising the event (passing out flyers, social media, radio etc.). This strategy had the added value of Detention personnel engaging with the local businesses and the community.

During the events, candidates completed paperwork necessary to the employment and background processes. When all the paperwork was completed, the candidate participated in a formal interview with Command Staff allowing candidates an opportunity to be introduced to and interview with departmental staff. This approach was very appealing to the newer generation of candidates who want instant gratification and tangible immediate results.

At the event location, there were displays including: inmate transport van, YCSO Dive Team van, job fair display with pictures and give-a-ways, and a continuous PowerPoint show. Importantly, several Detention Officers were present to meet and greet the candidates, explaining their roles within the facility and the many opportunities the department offers. Snack were also available to the candidates.

Following the event, background investigations were conducted, polygraph appointments were coordinated accordingly, and most attending candidates were hired within a month of the event.



Outcome(s) to Date:

3/15/2022 – 35 candidates, 12 hired, 9 retained as of 9/26/2022

6/15/2022 – 32 candidates, 10 hired, 10 retained as of 9/26/2022

Agency: Collin County Sheriff's Office, McKinney, Texas

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Description of Initiative – “Leaders don’t just complain, they contribute.” Improve Communications with Stakeholders, Create A Vision, Involve Employees

As with most agencies, Collin County’s most pressing issue was/is hiring and retention - we just were not treating it that way. While everyone knows hiring/retention is a priority for their jails they don’t even know their own statistics trends, market data, etc. Shouldn’t we know these things if it’s our greatest concern?

Our changed approach is to communicate the issue with all stakeholders, “get in the weeds”, and create a vision that everyone from the top down knows and understands. By engaging everyone, we discovered issues in:

1. **Culture** – We now assure we had the best representatives of our employees as our trainers and take an assertive approach with staff presenting negative attitudes.
2. **Hiring Process**- It was taking 2-4 months to hire an officer. By reducing redundant/unnecessary processes, we can hire in as little as 8 days.
3. **Marketing** - We expanded to a larger social media presence and hired a full time recruiter.
4. **Getting Information** - We learned that people are not always honest on exit interviews. We were getting generic feedback from resignations such as “family issues” or “it wasn’t for me” But, we noticed that most new hires were leaving right after the training program. When we pressed for honest feedback we realized that new officers were simply overwhelmed and afraid.
5. **Training Program**- Nobody would ever list “I was scared” on their resignation. It’s not necessarily a fear of being assaulted but more of being humiliated, lacking control, or violating policy. The simple fix is taking about it with recruits and properly socializing them to the environment. We meet with all new hires and explain that this fear is normal, and we have completely changed our FTO program to address it.
5. **Leadership** - The most impactful thing we did was engage the entire staff in the problem. Leaders don’t just complain, they contribute. We gave the staff an opportunity to contribute rather than just blame “management” for the lack of staff.
 - Recruiting cards were printed and distributed to everyone. We incentivized employees’ efforts - if they provide a referral, they were exempted from overtime for 30 days, picked their post for 30 days, and the County pays them \$250. The recruitment cards have space for them to include their contact information.

- This initiative had to be properly led as just giving out cards throughout the community would have minimal effect. We challenged staff - we asked them to commit to hiring just one person. If just one shift could accomplish this, it would be problem solved.
- Additionally, each shift Captain is responsible for their own turnover rate so we can measure their leadership effort.
- We also monitor shift topics to see how often recruitment and retention is discussed.

It has been less than one year since these changes have been implemented. One shift alone is responsible for 41 referrals. Recently we gave an officer an achievement award for recruiting 10 people. We have a staff of 369 (281 Detention Officers) and had 78 officer openings in January to 26 as of today and are steadily hiring more.



Agency: Davidson County Sheriffs' Office, Nashville, Tennessee

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Description of Initiative: Focus on Employee Retention

In 2019 the Davidson County Sheriff's Office prioritized keeping employee by creating the position of Officer Retention Specialist. Major job responsibilities included, but were not limited to:

- Increase employee engagement;
- Mentor newly hired correctional officers;
- Address concerns of long-term staff;
- Meet with officer regarding retention concerns;
- Assist with employees whose work performance needs improvement; and
- Prepare a plan to retain correctional staff.

As the position has evolved, the Sheriff's Office reports that responsibilities have included, and outcomes are:

- Expedite the hiring process by examining the time between application, the hiring decision, the first day worked and reducing the hurdle for the applicant.
- Use of a conditional offer letter to an applicant much earlier in hiring process.
- Implementation of job shadowing program to bring employees in the door.
- Review if hiring standards to assure these match the agency's actual needs? For example, is a physical agility test aligned with the current facilities, not a jail that is no longer in use.
- If applicants are moving from outside the area to accept a position, ensure they know where to look for housing; how to find local schools; and, how to find jobs for their spouse or partner.
- Increase in-house to staff support a new officer through expansion of our peer supporter program.
- More involvement with other law enforcement agencies for counseling staff.
- Created a mentorship program.

If you're not sure a new strategy will yield the desired result, try a test group as a sample and run in comparison to your regular process. Review the results and see what worked (and what didn't).

More Ideas and Strategies:

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Not attributed to specific initiatives of agencies – these ideas were sent in from the field (with thanks to the Tarrant County Sheriff's Office and Workforce Recruiting) See pages 48 -52: [The Future is Now: Recruiting, Retaining, and Developing the 21st Century Jail](#)

- Have a realistic recruitment budget that includes the costs of a professional recruitment initiative, including regular updating.
- Assure recruitment materials are reflecting the community in language and focus.
- Have robust social media campaign for recruiting to include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram focused on recruiting efforts. Tracking referrals helps identify the most productive strategy.
- The agency's recruitment site portrays the agency's professional image and is easy to navigate. The site may include short videos, updated frequently, with the jail's officers talking about their department and showcasing the jobs they do that positively impact the community they serve.
- The agency has a clear and modern BRAND.
- Check your [State's Workforce Commission](#)
- [Check in with the Army Career Skills Program: Bridging Military and Civilian Careers](#)

- Assemble an interdisciplinary recruitment campaign committee with internal representatives from the training academy, human resources, and public information, along with external partners from other state agencies (e.g., Department of Labor and Training; State Office of Diversity), which enables the jail to use resources maintained by other agencies (such as minority candidate lists and website links).
- Place recruitment materials in non-traditional locations such as Division of Motor Vehicles offices, targeted community and recreation centers, National Guard armories, fitness clubs, supermarkets, high school guidance offices, faith communities, college career service offices, coffee shops, pool halls, hair salons/barber shops, and laundromats.
- Maintain a hotline exclusively to relay information about correctional officer recruitment.
- Incentives:
 - **Moving Expenses** – Agencies assist with some of the costs of an applicant’s move to take the job – either across the country or across the county. Usually a set fee, the agency can also require the employee to provide receipts and to repay all or part of the reimbursement if they leave the agency within a specified period of time.
 - **Housing Assistance** – Housing assistance can take several forms, some of which are relevant for current staff as well as newcomers. These initiatives are particularly helpful in areas where the cost of housing is high; e.g.:
 - Roommate assistance – helping new employees locate potential roommates.
 - Rental location assistance – helping new hires identify rental accommodations.
 - New homes and mortgage assistance – helping new or existing staff locate housing for which public sector employee subsidies are provided. In Collier County, Florida, for example, public safety agencies collaborating with the state arranged for set-asides in new housing developments available to public safety workers and teachers. The lower purchase costs and lower mortgages are available if the family agrees to live in the home for five years.
 - **Educational Loan Forgiveness** – The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 establishes a new public safety loan forgiveness program. The program discharges any remaining debt after ten years of full-time employment in public service. For more information, see [PUBLIC SERVICE LOAN FORGIVENESS](#)
 - **Sign-On Bonuses** – In communities where there is competition for qualified workers, agencies are offering sign-on bonuses, ranging from \$1,000 or less to \$10,000 or more depending on the criticality of the need and the qualifications of the applicant. Most bonuses have stipulations about how much time the new employees must stay on the job, requiring reimbursement if the employee leaves before the contract period.
- **Citizen Try-Out Academies** – Offer interested applicants more than the traditional “citizen academy,” allowing them to work alongside employees, experience the full training academy, (including firearms and defensive driving), and get a feel for what it might be like to work there.
- **Citizens Involved in Selecting New Employees** – To enhance community “buy-in,” some organizations ask citizens not only to help locate potential new employees, but also to be involved in selection--for example, by sitting as members of review panels.
- **Employee Referral Bonuses** — This takes “employee recruiters” to the next level by rewarding those who bring new hires into the agency. While referral bonuses are being used to encourage current staff to become active recruiters, the incentives do not have to be monetary. Options include paid days off or anything else that is of value to employees. Some programs that are monetarily based provide a set fee to the referring staff member upon the new employee’s hiring, and perhaps an additional fee when the recruit completes pre-service training and/or their first year on the job. Providing long-term incentives past the day of hire encourages the current employee’s investment in the success of the newcomer. One

caution with this approach should be noted, however—using current employees to recruit may not be appropriate if the agency needs to focus on greater diversity than representative in the existing workforce.

- **Target Displaced Workers** – If a business in the community is closing or laying-off workers, recruiters should be able to respond immediately with job information and applications. This strategy requires the agency to know the business climate in their regional area, pay attention to commercial indicators, and capitalize on partnerships in the business community.
- **Establish community and business partnerships** – Jails should not take for granted that the surrounding community knows about their need for employees. Jails need to be proactive in getting their message out to local organizations, encouraging them to tour the facility, providing written materials, and speaking at civic, faith-based, and business meetings. This is not a one-time process, but a continual educational process that establishes and nourishes collaborative partnerships.
- **Survey New Hires** – Several months into their employment, ask new hires (anonymously) why they took the job, what attracted them to the agency, what they like so far, and what they would change.
- **Be Responsive** – Give top priority to responding quickly to the questions and needs of applicants (and/or their family members). Quite simply, the new generation of workers will not wait for you.
- **Retirees Can Help** – Asking agency retirees to help with recruitment by handling administrative duties, making or responding to phone calls and emails, and other such tasks capitalizes on their enthusiasm and knowledge, while lowering costs for the agency.
- **Go Back to College** – Even if a local community college or four-year institution has a criminal justice degree program, do not assume that the instructors know about jails or your organization’s employment needs. Get in touch, offer tours, develop internships, review the curriculum, offer to be a guest speaker, and keep the connection going. The sooner those attending college learn about your agency’s career opportunities, the better for all involved.
- **Open Houses** – Offer tours and open house events to any interested community organizations, including, of course, the media. Connect citizens to volunteer opportunities or the agency’s citizen’s academy.
- **Film Stars** – Videotape new employees as they participate in some of their basic training experiences (e.g., classroom, physical fitness, firearms range). This provides an honest look at what the training will be like and helps prevent new recruits from being surprised by what will be expected of them.