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# Strategies for Improving Officer Recruitment in the San Diego Police Department

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Prepared for the San Diego Police Department



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## Preface

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The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) sought to increase the number of sworn officers in the department from 1,901 to its authorized strength of 2,109. At the same time, the department is competing with other local and federal law-enforcement agencies, facing a large number of imminent retirements, and recruiting from a labor pool with many other job opportunities and that is increasingly unqualified for police work due to obesity and prior drug use.

To ensure that SDPD is best prepared to provide for the public safety of San Diego residents, SDPD asked the RAND Center on Quality Policing to review its recruiting programs and develop strategies for targeting and attracting a diverse group of qualified new recruits. This monograph describes the methodology and findings of that study and, most importantly, presents evidence-based recommendations for improving SDPD's recruiting process.

This monograph should be of interest to the SDPD leadership and San Diego officials involved in public-safety policymaking. Community members and those with business interests in San Diego may also find this monograph informative. It may also prove useful to residents and officials in other jurisdictions with police departments that are below authorized strength and under pressure to recruit new officers. Related RAND work includes the following:

- the Police Recruitment and Retention Clearinghouse, a RAND Center on Quality Policing resource
- *Recruitment and Retention: Lessons for the New Orleans Police Department* (Rostker, Hix, and Wilson, 2007)

- *Police Personnel Challenges After September 11: Anticipating Expanded Duties and a Changing Labor Pool* (Raymond et al., 2005)
- *Evaluation of the New York City Police Department Firearm Training and Firearm-Discharge Review Process* (Rostker, Hanser, et al., 2008)
- *Police-Community Relations in Cincinnati* (Riley et al., 2005)
- *Police-Community Relations in Cincinnati: Year Two Evaluation Report* (Ridgeway et al., 2006)
- *Police-Community Relations in Cincinnati: Year Three Evaluation Report* (Schell et al., 2007)
- *Training the 21st Century Police Officer: Redefining Police Professionalism for the Los Angeles Police Department* (Glenn et al., 2003).

## The RAND Center on Quality Policing

This research was conducted under the auspices of the RAND Center on Quality Policing (CQP), part of the Safety and Justice Program within RAND Infrastructure, Safety, and Environment (ISE). The center's mission is to help guide the efforts of police agencies to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness of their operations. The center's research and analysis focus on force planning (e.g., recruitment, retention, training), performance measurement, cost-effective best practices, and use of technology, as well as issues in police-community relations. The mission of ISE is to improve the development, operation, use, and protection of society's essential physical assets and natural resources and to enhance the related social assets of safety and security of individuals in transit and in their workplaces and communities. Safety and Justice Program research addresses occupational safety, courts and corrections, and public safety—including violence prevention, policing, substance abuse, and public integrity.

Questions or comments about this monograph should be sent to the project leader, Greg Ridgeway (Greg\_Ridgeway@rand.org). Information is available online about the Safety and Justice Program (<http://>

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## Summary

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The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) has been operating below its authorized size in recent years. For instance, in February 2007, the department had 1,901 sworn officers, and 51 of these officers were recruits enrolled in the academy. This means that the department was operating with 208 fewer officers than authorized at that time. To bridge this personnel gap, the department needs to maximize its recruiting while minimizing officer attrition. To accomplish this goal, the department sought assistance from RAND to improve its recruiting efforts. In addition, the department asked RAND to suggest ways to improve the diversity of its recruits. This monograph describes the effort to assist SDPD's recruiting program.

We conceptualize that six key factors influence the number of SDPD recruits: (1) job seekers' propensity to join SDPD; (2) local labor-market conditions; (3) the opinions of community and influencers toward SDPD; (4) recruiting resources, such as the number of recruiters and the advertising budget; (5) efficiency of the department's recruiting process; and (6) recruiter and resource management. While SDPD cannot directly control the first three environmental factors, it can optimize the recruiting process and manage recruiters and resources to achieve the maximum number of recruits, even if recruiting resources may be constant for the near future. In fact, studies on military recruiting have shown that the military can increase the number of enlistments with little or no cost by effectively managing existing recruiters and recruiting resources.

Therefore, we concentrate on SDPD's recruiting process, which attracts applicants and then converts applicants into recruits. We first assessed several strategies to expand SDPD's applicant pool. Then, we evaluated the effectiveness of the written-test process. Finally, we reviewed the fitness exams and background checks. We collected qualitative data through in-person interviews, participatory observations of SDPD's recruiting processes, and review of recruiting materials from SDPD and other law-enforcement agencies. In addition, we collected and analyzed quantitative data from surveys and administrative databases.

Based on results from the qualitative and quantitative analyses, we have specific recommendations to improve SDPD's recruiting efforts:

1. Target recruiting resources more effectively to reach a broader pool of applicants.
2. Improve efficiency in the screening process.
3. Revise recruiting and testing practices.

## **Target Recruiting Practices to Appeal to a Broader Range of Applicants**

### **Produce Marketing Materials That Highlight the Benefits of a Law-Enforcement Career with SDPD**

Increasing the number of police-academy graduates starts with increasing the number of applicants participating in the screening process. To accomplish this, we recommend that SDPD marketing and outreach materials (e.g., brochures; print, radio, and outdoor advertising) emphasize primarily the personal satisfaction and financial benefits of employment with SDPD. Our findings indicate that applicants are strongly motivated by a desire to serve the community, the pride that one derives from being a police officer, and an interest in securing stable employment at a good salary. SDPD starting salaries are comparable to salaries of college graduates in the San Diego area. Nonetheless, current marketing materials highlight the job eligibility requirements and the hurdles and barriers to becoming an SDPD officer. While informa-

tion of this sort is certainly relevant in the screening process, the intent of marketing materials should be to motivate an interested person to begin the process of discovering why he or she can become a police officer rather than give them reasons why he or she cannot. Formal eligibility requirements and exclusions can be communicated to applicants after they have made an affirmative decision to get more information on their own—for example, in conversations with an SDPD recruiter or in a frequently asked questions section of the SDPD recruiting Web site.

### **Modernize the SDPD Recruiting Web Site**

Today, most job seekers rely on the Internet to acquire information about employment opportunities. We therefore recommend that SDPD modernize its recruiting Web site. The site need not be a spectacular multimedia experience, but it should at least reflect the professionalism of SDPD itself. Our analysis of the current Web site found the quality of information and ease of use to be fair, while the aesthetic value was generally poor. Immediate improvements to the quality of information could be made by providing SDPD Recruiting staff substantial control over content, including working with a professional Web-design firm, regularly updating test dates, and providing prospective applicants with a sample written test.

### **Focus Recruiting Efforts Close to San Diego and in Carefully Selected Sites Nationally**

SDPD has conducted some recruitment activities outside the San Diego area and has expressed interest in expanding these efforts. Based on our analysis of U.S. internal migration data and a review of scientific literature on geographic mobility, we conclude that SDPD's recruiting resources should be targeted in local areas closer to San Diego. Research on migration suggests that moving for employment is a relatively rare event. In addition, in recent years, the San Diego area is experiencing more emigration than immigration. Even among people who would be willing to relocate a long distance for a career in law enforcement, our analysis shows that SDPD's basic pay is not necessarily as attractive (in terms of what non-degree holders can expect

to earn or adjusted for costs of living) as what can be earned at other agencies in California. Together, these factors suggest that SDPD will have a difficult time convincing prospective applicants to move to the San Diego area from far away.

At times, SDPD has developed good contacts and inside information at out-of-state venues. Our recommendation should not discourage SDPD from taking advantages of such opportunities. In fact, to aid SDPD with this type of targeted effort, we have identified several criminal-justice programs nationally that produce a large number of graduates that the local law-enforcement labor market cannot likely absorb.

### **Utilize SDPD's Internal Labor as a Pool of Candidates**

We recommend that SDPD develop a broader recruiting vision that formalizes a process for using some of its civilian workforce as a pool for recruits. As with people referred by police officers, SDPD will have more relevant information on the character, motivations, and work habits of these candidates than they will of people whom no one in the department knows personally. Those interested in SDPD recruit positions who are not yet eligible for employment (e.g., they do not yet meet age requirements, they need to resolve credit or financial solvency issues, they have not reached the time limitations on past minor drug use) should be actively recruited into nonofficer positions within the department—for example, in traffic management or records. SDPD already implements this informally when possible, such as with recruits who decide that they are not yet ready for police work. Employment in these kinds of positions can help sustain their interest in SDPD until they become eligible to enter the academy, while the department benefits from their service as civilian employees and from the opportunity to evaluate their officer potential firsthand. This recommendation may have limited impact because, at SDPD, many of these positions require the applicant to pass the same background checks, such as criminal, drug, and credit histories. But for recruits with too many traffic tickets, several years in a civilian position at SDPD can give the applicant the chance to demonstrate the ability to maintain a clean driving record,

relieve SDPD's demand for civilian labor, and keep a potential recruit nearby.

### **Offer Cash Incentives for Officers Referring New Applicants and Recruits**

Current SDPD officers and civilian staff are potentially the most effective recruiting resource available to the department. Our findings indicate that almost half of written-test takers were first prompted to consider SDPD employment by a friend or relative in law enforcement. A cursory review of recruitment efforts by another big-city police department also shows personal referrals to be much more efficient at producing hires than are other efforts, such as advertising and formal recruitment activities. Prospective applicants clearly value insights from practicing professionals whom they regard as having inside information about the job and the department. To maximize these social-network advantages, we recommend that SDPD institute a cash referral incentive to current SDPD officers and civilian staff. SDPD has already developed a proposal to implement such a program, and we believe that such a proposal should get serious consideration. Details of the program remain an issue, and we recommend some variations that we believe will maximize the program's effectiveness. As a starting point for discussion, we recommend considering a \$50 bonus for referring someone who passes the written exam, a \$1,000 bonus for the first referred applicant who successfully joins SDPD,<sup>1</sup> \$3,000 for the second successful referral, and \$2,000 for each successfully referred applicant thereafter. We observed people coming to the written test in small groups and propose the \$50 referral-to-test bonus to further cultivate that effect. The current SDPD bonus proposal for referring a successful recruit suggests \$2,000, equivalent to the signing bonus given to lateral hires when they complete field training. Restructuring it as \$1,000 for the first and \$3,000 for the second is designed to give additional incentive for each officer to seek that second hire. Tracking of applicants and

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<sup>1</sup> The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) currently offers a \$1,000 cash reward for bringing in a successful recruit. SDPD recruiting managers indicated that a program that cost \$2,000 per recruit was a good return on investment.

the associated SDPD staff who referred the applicant requires care and oversight. LAPD has opened participation in the bonus program to local nonprofit organizations and has garnered a handful of additional recruits in the process.

Signing bonuses have become popular but can be inefficient because many of the officers would have joined without the bonuses. However, they can instantly attract the media's and the public's attention. We recommend that SDPD initiate the referral bonus plan first, and, if that does not meet the department's needs, that plan can be supplemented with targeted and general signing bonuses if necessary.

## Improve Efficiency in the Screening Process

While increasing the number of applicants is essential, keeping as many qualified applicants in the screening process is also a necessary condition for improving department recruiting. Table S.1 gives an overview of the recruiting process and the rates at which candidates drop out or are screened out. Overall, 7 percent of the applicants for SDPD officer positions complete the process and enter the academy.

**Table S.1**  
**Percentage of Applicants Who Drop Out or Are Screened Out in Stages of SDPD's Recruiting Process**

Stage	Pass (%)
Written test	62
Sergeant's background review (of those who passed the written and physical tests)	54
Clear full background check and medical and psychological exams, and get hired (of those who passed the sergeant's review)	22
Overall probability of hiring	7

SOURCE: SDPD recruiting database.

**Provide an Online Sample Test**

The SDPD screening process reflects the high professional standards of the department. However, the standards may also be intimidating to prospective applicants. Presently, SDPD applicants enter the written test generally unaware of the material on which they are being evaluated. This may depress the test scores of applicants who do not perform well on some material that they encounter for the first time but that they could learn and apply with practice. Ostensibly, this is the rationale behind allowing applicants to take the written test multiple times. The unfamiliarity of the test materials may also dissuade some potential candidates from taking the written test at all. Therefore, it is important that SDPD do its best to demystify the screening criteria. Providing a sample test should be among SDPD's highest priorities in the area of improving the screening process. Sample tests can improve test scores, and there is some evidence that they are particularly effective in getting minority candidates to participate in the application process (Whetstone, Reed, and Turner, 2006).

**Allow Other Standardized Tests to Substitute for SDPD's Written Test**

Many of the aptitudes evaluated by the written test are also measured by other commonly administered standardized tests—such as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Reasoning Test, and the American College Testing program (ACT). SDPD and the City of San Diego should consider allowing an applicant's score on these standardized tests above a certain level to substitute for a passing score on the SDPD written test. This could provide a number of advantages. First, it will remove one formal step in the application process for high-aptitude individuals and therefore encourage them to take the next steps of appearing for the physical-ability test (PAT) and submitting a formal background questionnaire. Second, allowing the substitution of ASVAB scores will provide SDPD an opportunity to send a clear message to San Diego's large active-duty military workforce that it is seriously interested in them and credits them for accomplishments they have already achieved. Our analysis shows that SDPD (and maybe other law-enforcement agencies)

is already fairly successful in attracting applicants from this population. Allowing high-aptitude military personnel to bypass the first step in the application process will provide a potential recruitment advantage over other law-enforcement agencies that are competing for this population.

### **Conduct a Pilot Study to Find an Optimal Pass Point for the Written Test**

One of the critical elements of a fair and informative test is the establishment of a pass point that not only excludes low-quality applicants but also includes as many applicants who are able to perform as a police officer. Currently, the written test screens out 40 percent of applicants at the initial stage of the recruiting process. Given the need for considerably more candidates at later stages of the recruiting process and the fact that academy classes in the 12 months preceding this writing have had only one academic failure, there is a compelling argument that the pass point is currently set too high. We recommend that the city complete a study to find a new pass point for the written test.

This action should not be interpreted as a lowering of department recruiting standards. Instead, it is an effort to find an optimal pass point that does not screen out capable applicants who may be rejected under the current pass point but who still have high potential for success at the academy and otherwise possess appropriate background qualifications. As we mentioned, only one SDPD officer recruit in the past year has failed the academy for academic reasons. A new pass point might increase the risk that new recruits will fail coursework at the academy; however, in light of personnel shortfalls in recent years, we feel that this risk is outweighed by the potential to expand the overall number of qualified academy graduates.

### **Analyze the Written Test for Problematic Questions**

San Diego's city testing service uses a formal system to identify knowledge, skills, and abilities that police officers need and to develop test questions that measure abilities in those dimensions. Questions undergo careful review during test development. We recommend additional analyses of test questions using applicant test-score data to iden-

tify problematic questions. We have no evidence that such questions exist, but research on test development suggests that such analyses of test scores and test-item responses should be a regular practice, especially when fielding a new version of a test. For example, tests of differential item functioning (DIF) analysis can be used to flag test items that might have racial, ethnic, or other cultural bias. DIF analysis flags test items that, for example, nonwhite test takers are more likely to miss than white test takers who perform similarly to the nonwhite test takers on other items. Polishing such test items will help SDPD keep as many qualified underrepresented applicants as possible in the screening process. This will, in turn, increase the chances of improving the diversity of recruits.

### **Petition Peace Officer Standards and Training to Create a Written Examination Process That Meets San Diego's Police Testing Needs**

The design of fair and informative tests is a challenging process, a burden that is best shared by a large number of departments. California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) offers such a written test, the POST Entry-Level Test Battery, as a service to member departments. However, the test items may not meet SDPD's standards, and delays in scoring the tests are currently too limiting for the test to be of use for SDPD's testing schedule. We recommend that SDPD, along with other California police departments, petition POST to create a written examination process that meets SDPD's standards and tight recruiting timeline. A potential disadvantage of using POST is that SDPD would lose its ability to closely interact with test development and management, a benefit that needs to be balanced with the cost of crafting fair and accurate written tests.

### **Strengthen the Recruiting Workforce and Practices**

An SDPD internal analysis shows that, given the current levels of officer turnover and academy graduations, bringing the number of officers up to the desired level could be a long-term effort. SDPD projections indicate that, with 50 graduates from each academy, the department

will reach 2,000 officers some time in 2010. If the department cannot consistently produce 50 graduates per quarter, the department would not reach its authorized strength for several more years; with 40 graduates, SDPD would not reach its authorized strength until 2014. Starting in 2005, SDPD began conducting four academy classes per year and, since 2006, has graduated an average of 25 officers per class. This has allowed SDPD to maintain its size, but the inability to fill academy classes in 2003 and 2004 resulted in a current shortage of 100 officers. After fielding a new recruiting team early in 2007, SDPD has been adding an average of 32 new officers to its ranks with each academy class, with the next two classes projected to have nearly 50. Our recommendations in this section aim to strengthen SDPD Recruiting's capability to consistently attract more than 40 officers to each academy class.

### **Establish a Stable Recruiting Budget**

We strongly recommend that the city and the department establish a stable recruiting budget at the beginning of each fiscal year. We support SDPD's contention that recruiting should be a line item in the department's budget. This sends a clear signal to all stakeholders that recruiting is an important mission of the department. This will also reinforce the recruiting team's recent successes and empower team leaders to plan and execute recruiting priorities for the fiscal year.

### **Make Written-Test Dates Marketing Events**

We recommend that the department turn written test dates into marketing events that help applicants solidify the decision to follow through on the entire application process. Applicants appearing for the written test are clearly people of special interest to any law-enforcement recruiter. Many applicants pass the written and physical exams but later withdraw from the process, showing that the fact that they took the time and effort to take the exam does not mean that they have fully committed to a career with SDPD. The several times per month that these groups assemble offer SDPD recruiters an excellent opportunity to exhibit career opportunities at SDPD, including the K9 unit, the mounted division, and special weapons and tactics (SWAT), and

to present occupational specialties, such as child-abuse investigation and arson investigation, which might generate particular interest in the aftermath of the devastating 2007 fires.

An alternate strategy is to supplement SDPD's current program for the mornings of the monthly PAT. Currently at the PAT, recruiters work toward building the applicants' commitment to SDPD, in part with speeches designed to inspire applicants to stick through the process because a rewarding career lies ahead. In addition, SDPD officers cheer and root for every candidate through his or her attempt at completing the PAT. With a sufficient number of recruiters on hand, this can be supplemented with additional interaction so that every applicant has the opportunity to personally interact with at least one SDPD officer, receive an acknowledgment of their willingness to serve the community, and ask questions of SDPD's professional police officers. Many of those present will not pass the exam or the background process, but, for those who do pass, a good first impression of SDPD will give them less interest in considering other options.

### **Applicants Who Drop Themselves from the Recruiting Process Should Be Redirected to Recruiters**

As stated, the department must make every effort to retain applicants during the screening process. For instance, applicants who do not complete their application materials or who fail to appear for interviews with background investigators are issued "constructive waivers," indicating that their applications have been formally terminated but that the reason for the termination is not due to an SDPD finding against the applicant. We found that 13 percent of applicants who passed the written test received constructive waivers and that women were more than twice as likely as men to receive a constructive waiver. Rather than terminating the application and issuing such notices, we recommend that those applications be referred first to a recruiter for follow-up. A call or visit from a recruiter may convert some of these applicants to recruits.

**Establish a Formal Incentive System for Recruiters**

The current recruiting team has made significant progress using an informal system that emphasizes teamwork and close interactions among recruiters and managers. For instance, the recruiting sergeant meets daily with recruiters, and recruiters keep daily journals, which the supervisor reviews. Managers qualitatively evaluate recruiters based on their contribution to the team. This informal system works well for the current recruiting team, whose members are specially selected to improve the recruiting conditions. The department needs to prepare for a future in which some (or all) members of the current team may no longer be assigned to recruiting duty. We recommend that the department establish a formal system to manage its recruiters, as the current system depends on qualitative judgments of managers.

Benchmarks and targets are essential parts of all successful recruiting programs. They clarify the mission for the recruiting team and set concrete goals toward which the team members should strive. In setting goals, the department can communicate clearly to recruiters what types of recruits are most needed. These types may include applicants with a college education or the ability to speak a foreign language.<sup>2</sup> As recruiters are given recruiting missions, SDPD should establish incentives, honorary or monetary if possible, for them. The department should design awards, such as plaques, achievement medals, and enhanced promotion opportunities. And the department should use objective performance measures, such as the number of applicants who pass the fitness test over some period. A recruiter who has successfully guided high-value applicants should receive more points than other recruiters. This implies that the department should develop and implement an applicant-tracking system that can track each applicant from the first contact through the recruiting process.

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<sup>2</sup> Proposition 209, passed in California in 1996, prohibits public institutions from giving preferential treatment to an individual on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin. Preferential treatment includes the encouragement of recruiting from underrepresented groups for employment in public agencies.

**Develop a Succession Plan for Subsequent Recruiting Teams**

As we described, the current recruiting team has achieved measurable successes. It is essential that the department sustain this momentum by maintaining the quality of the recruiting team, as team members inevitably move onto new assignments. We recommend that the department develop a succession plan for subsequent recruiting teams. The plan should specify the selection criteria for recruiters, formalize a training plan for new members of the team, and set clear evaluation standards.



# Abbreviations

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ACS	American Community Survey
ACT	American College Testing
AFQT	Armed Forces Qualifying Test
ARJIS	Automated Regional Justice Information System
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
CIP	Classification of Instructional Programs
COLI	cost-of-living index
CQP	RAND Center on Quality Policing
DIF	differential item functioning
HIRE	Household Inclusion Recruitment and Employment
IPEDS	Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System
ISE	RAND Infrastructure, Safety, and Environment
LAPD	Los Angeles Police Department
LVMPD	Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department
MSA	metropolitan statistical area
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

PAT	physical-ability test
PERF	Police Executive Research Forum
PHS	personal-history statement
PHXPD	Phoenix Police Department
PIQ	pre-investigation questionnaire
PORIP	Police Officer Recruitment Incentive Program
POST	California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
SDPD	San Diego Police Department
SWAT	special weapons and tactics

## Introduction

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In February 2007, the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) had 1,901 sworn officers, 208 officers fewer than it would have at its authorized and desired size. Of its 1,901 officers, 51 were recruits enrolled in the academy. Under normal circumstances, this shortage of 259 officers would be a temporary issue, solved in about a year with at-capacity academy classes. However, the department has been facing longer-term recruiting and retention challenges. For instance, in FY 2006, an average of six officers per month left the department for jobs at other law-enforcement agencies, and another nine retired or resigned. Moreover, academy classes were not near capacity to bridge the gap between the current and desired sizes.

Historically, SDPD has been able to maintain the department's size by graduating an average of 25 cadets several times per year. However, in 2003 and 2004, the four academy classes produced just three new SDPD officers. This created a setback for SDPD in its ability to keep pace with its rate of employee turnover. While the most recent academy class has 47 recruits, recovering from the staffing shortfall and accommodating for a more moderate rate of staff turnover are likely to be a long-term process.

The department sought assistance from RAND to improve its recruiting efforts. This monograph details our response. Our effort included a literature review of current promising recruiting practices, interviews with individuals involved in the recruiting process, and the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data on recruit-

ing. From these activities, we developed specific recommendations to improve the department's recruiting efforts:

- Target a broader pool of applicants.
- Improve efficiency in the screening process.
- Strengthen its recruiting workforce and practices.

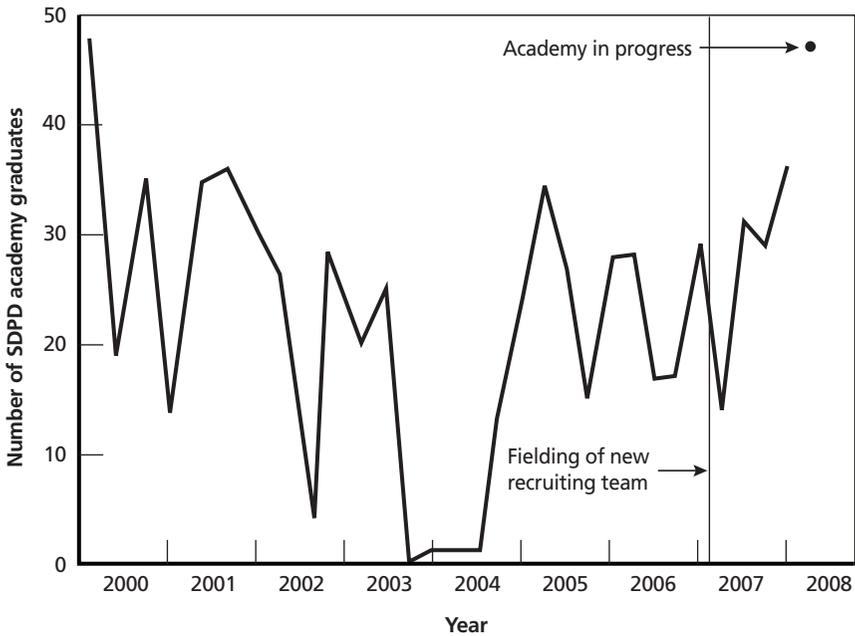
## **State of SDPD Recruiting**

We found that SDPD has already made significant improvements in its recruiting. The department has implemented many of the practices that are regarded as “best” or “most promising” in the policing literature. The department has rejuvenated its recruiting staff and streamlined its recruiting practices.

These changes have had measurable impacts on the department's recruiting. Between July 2003 and September 2004, roughly when talk of San Diego's potential insolvency began, a total of three new recruits joined SDPD. Starting in 2005, SDPD began having four academy classes per year and, since 2006, has been able to have an average of 25 officers graduating from each class. This has allowed SDPD to maintain its size, but it has not been able to make up for the loss of 100 officers who would have been recruited in 2003 and 2004 had academy classes been filled (see Figure 1.1).

Since fielding a new recruiting team early in 2007, SDPD has been adding an average of 32 new officers to its ranks with each academy. However, SDPD projections indicate that, even with 40 graduates from each academy class, the department would not reach 2,000 officers until July 2010 and would not reach 2,100 officers until 2014. The next two academy classes are estimated to graduate 50 new hires, a rate that, if maintained, would yield a department with 2,100 officers in 2010.

**Figure 1.1**  
**Number of SDPD Academy Graduates Since 2000**



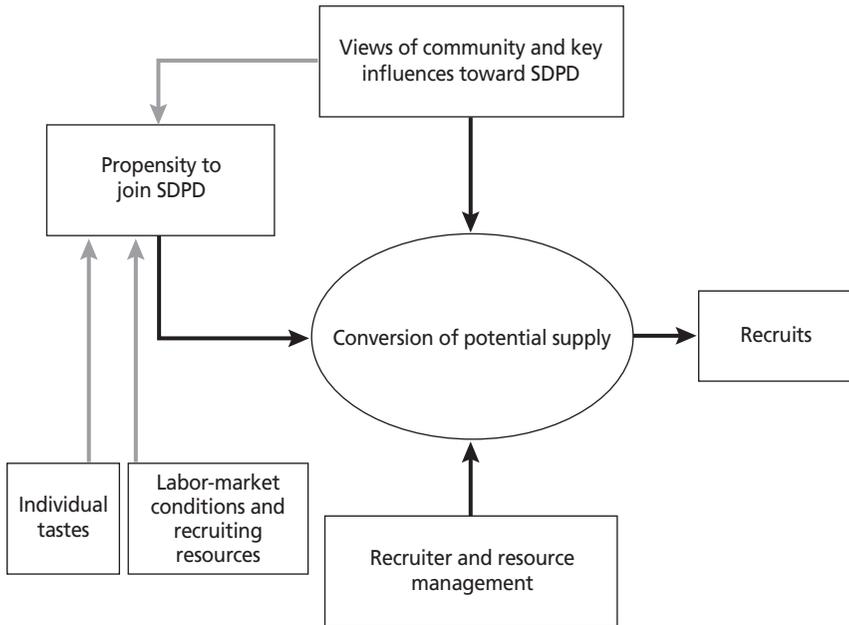
SOURCE: SDPD academy data.  
 RAND MG724-1.1

## Conceptual Framework

To organize the development of the analyses and proposed strategies, we developed a guiding conceptual framework. In doing so, we specified key factors that can influence the number of recruits and their demographic diversity. These key factors can be divided roughly into two main categories: environmental factors that are beyond direct control of SDPD and policy factors that SDPD can alter to maximize the number of recruits.<sup>1</sup> Figure 1.2 depicts these factors and their role in the SDPD recruiting process.

<sup>1</sup> Economic literature on recruiting generally categorizes as environmental factors those affecting labor supply while employer policies are those relating to labor demand.

**Figure 1.2**  
**Environmental and Policy Factors Influencing Numbers of Recruits**



SOURCE: Adapted from Asch and Orvis (1994).

RAND MG724-1.2

The first key environmental factor influencing the number of applicants and recruits is job seekers’ propensity to join SDPD. The greater the propensity, the greater the number of applicants willing to participate in the recruiting process. The propensity is, in turn, affected by the views and opinions of community and influencers (e.g., spouses, parents, friends) toward SDPD, individual tastes toward the police profession, local labor-market conditions, and SDPD’s recruiting resources. A favorable view of SDPD among local communities increases a job seeker’s level of aspiration to be an SDPD police officer. Similarly, positive opinions among influencers—those individuals to whom job seekers turn in making their career decisions, such as spouses, parents, career counselors, and community leaders—have a positive effect on the propensity to serve in SDPD. On the other hand, a strong local economy with a low level of unemployment dampens the propensity to

join, as there are a variety of alternative opportunities for job seekers in the tight labor market. While the factors discussed so far are beyond the direct control of SDPD, the department can indirectly influence the level of propensity by maintaining positive relationships with the community and increasing recruiting resources, such as advertisement, outreach efforts, recruiting bonuses, and numbers of recruiters.

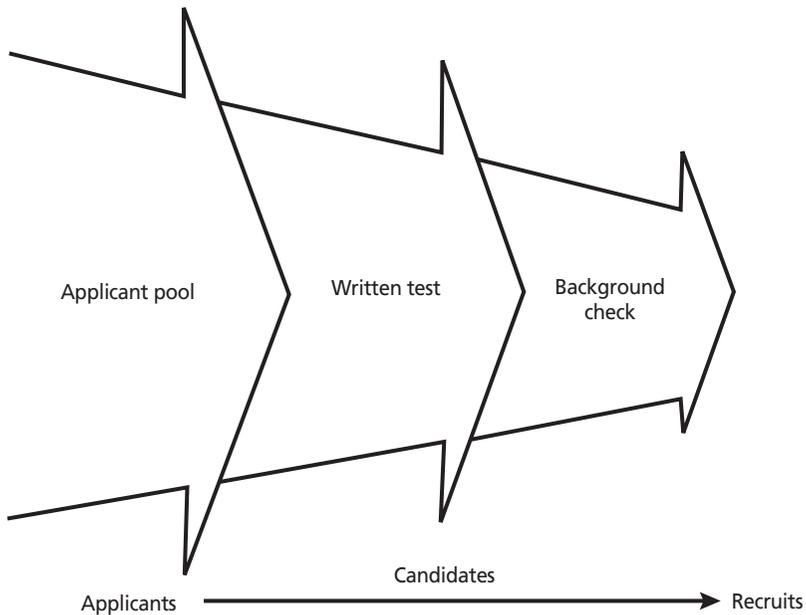
Besides recruiting resources, SDPD controls two policy factors: recruiter and resource management and the process of converting potential supply to actual officers. Recruiter and resource management includes various functions of SDPD's recruiting unit: how SDPD tasks recruiters to attract potential applicants, how the department designs monetary and honorary incentives for recruiters' productivity, and which advertising content and media mix SDPD uses. *Conversion process* refers to the department's recruiting policies, screening and hiring standards, and practices and procedures that each applicant must face to become a recruit. Major steps of this process are the written and physical tests and the background investigation. SDPD must minimize unnecessary losses in the conversion process to achieve the optimal number of recruits.

The military has developed extensive databases over the past several decades documenting investments, such as advertising campaigns, recruiter incentives, and recruit incentives, as well as the return on those investments in terms of the number of recruits. In addition, the military has used scientific experimentation to test recruiting strategies in regional markets. SDPD's recruiting task does not approach the magnitude of the military's, so the historical data and the capacity to experiment limit the ability to use statistical and econometric analyses to estimate the relative influence of each of the components in Figure 1.2. Instead, we use qualitative and quantitative evidence to assess all relevant factors likely to influence the number of SDPD recruits. We focus on those policies within the control of SDPD and the San Diego city government to attract and retain recruits. These strategies include improved advertising through the Internet and marketing materials, developing targeted recruiting opportunities, and reviewing the conversion process, such as redesigning the written test and limiting losses of qualified candidates during the recruiting process.

## Focus of Our Analysis

While substantial progress was made in 2007, we developed a series of analyses to assess options to accelerate progress toward these goals. Figure 1.3 gives a sketch of the recruiting process and forms the focus of our study. First, the department needs applicants. Between January and December 2007, SDPD averaged 232 applicants each month. To exceed 40 graduates per academy, SDPD needs to attract 250 applicants per month without compromising quality. Since June 2007, SDPD has been meeting or exceeding this goal. In the study, we assessed several strategies to help ensure that SDPD continues to achieve this target, including outreach through SDPD staff, effective use of the Internet, and targeted recruiting in criminal-justice programs.

**Figure 1.3**  
**SDPD's Recruiting Process and the Flow of Our Analysis**



Second, about 60 percent of applicants clear the written test. The written test may be an effective screening tool, or it may be greatly limiting SDPD access to qualified candidates.

Third, the remainder of the recruiting process consists of background checks and fitness exams. We found that 7 percent of applicants clear the entire recruiting process; most are screened out by the written test and background checks. While we reviewed each step, we made no effort to second-guess decisions of background investigators or the suitability of the medical and psychological exams. As a result, this monograph focuses on increasing the labor pool's attraction to SDPD and on the written test.

Lastly, SDPD needs to retain its academy graduates and existing officers. We were not tasked with studying the retention issue, but, clearly, it is integral to achieving SDPD's goal of having a force of 2,109 officers. If SDPD can make even incremental gains in each of these areas—attracting more officers, holding onto qualified candidates through the recruiting process, and retaining existing officers—SDPD could have 2,109 officers within the next two years.

## **Organization of This Monograph**

This chapter provides the context and a brief discussion of our approach. The remainder of the monograph is organized as follows. Chapter Two identifies and evaluates promising practices in police recruiting and hiring. Chapter Three discusses the results and implications of our survey assessing applicants' motivations for a law-enforcement career and SDPD employment. Chapter Four concerns an evaluation of SDPD's Internet presence in comparison to those of three neighboring law-enforcement agencies. Chapter Five investigates whether SDPD should engage in recruitment activities outside the San Diego area. Chapter Six describes strategies for managing recruiters. Chapter Seven provides an analysis of SDPD's application process. Chapter Eight discusses the written exam. Chapter Nine summarizes our key recommendations.



## Excellence in Police Recruitment and Hiring

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### Introduction

Recruitment and hiring of officers is one of the most pressing issues facing law-enforcement administrators today. From San Diego to New York City, police agencies throughout the nation report substantial difficulty in finding and keeping officers. Although the number of law-enforcement officers nationwide grew by 3.4 percent from 2000 to 2004, the rate of growth during these years was substantially less than that during the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, 20 of the 50 largest local police agencies in the nation shrank in size from 2000 to 2004, in some cases by as much as 10 to 15 percent.

Although numerous factors have undoubtedly contributed to this trend, the availability of qualified recruits has been an important one. In 2000, 30 percent of police agencies serving jurisdictions of 50,000 or more people reported that a lack of qualified applicants was causing much difficulty in filling vacancies, and 35 percent reported that this was causing at least some difficulty; for smaller agencies, the corresponding figures were 24 and 31 percent.<sup>2</sup>

The nation's largest police agencies are among those being hit hardest by recruitment difficulties. From 1989 to 2002, the average

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<sup>1</sup> Reaves (2007, p. 1). Police agencies grew 27 percent from 1987 to 2003, for a rate of about 1.7 percent annually (Hickman and Reaves, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Koper and Moore (2001a). In addition, among those agencies that declined in size from 1996 to 1999, 54 percent of large agencies (those serving jurisdictions of 50,000 or more persons) and 43 percent of smaller agencies cited the availability of qualified recruits as a contributing factor (Koper and Moore, 2001b).

number of applicants to agencies with 500 or more officers declined 37 percent, while the percentage of applicants who were successful declined 43 percent (Taylor et al., 2005). From 1999 to 2002, these agencies appeared to have less than one qualified applicant—and less than one hire—for every open position. Sixteen percent were operating at less than 90 percent of their authorized strength.<sup>3</sup>

Police agencies are also particularly concerned about recruitment of women and racial and ethnic minorities, who remain underrepresented in police agencies despite gains in the past few decades.<sup>4</sup> In large police agencies, women are hired at a rate 71 percent below their representation in the population (Taylor et al., 2005). Similarly, racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented by 15 percent. These populations constitute important segments of the labor pool that police agencies could tap more effectively to meet staffing needs. Further, it is generally believed that improving their representation (especially that of racial and ethnic minorities) in policing will improve communication and collaboration between police and the communities they serve, enhancing police accountability and legitimacy in the process (see, e.g., National Research Council, 2004).

Experts commonly cite a number of causes for recent staffing problems in policing: retirements of officers from the baby-boom generation; a smaller, better-educated generation of young workers with less interest in law enforcement (and public service more generally) and less tolerance for the length of the law-enforcement selection process; greater levels of drug use, obesity, and indebtedness among young people, which makes many of them unqualified for police work (Raymond et al., 2005); relatively low salaries in law enforcement (particularly in a strong economy); negative or otherwise mistaken perceptions

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<sup>3</sup> However, note that, in 2003, the average number of hires in police agencies serving cities of 1 million or more people (such as San Diego) was greater than the average number of separations (Hickman and Reaves, 2003). And while these agencies also lost an average of 74 military reservists in 2003, these losses seem to have been offset by the use of full- and part-time reserve and auxiliary personnel.

<sup>4</sup> Women rose from 8 percent of local police officers in 1987 to 11 percent in 2003 (Hickman and Reaves, 2003). During this same time, racial and ethnic minority representation increased from 15 percent of local police officers to 24 percent.

of policing, particularly among underrepresented populations; and greater competition from the military, federal law-enforcement agencies, and private security firms in the wake of 9/11.

This review briefly examines practices in police recruitment and hiring. Specifically, we address (1) recruitment and marketing efforts, (2) methods of officer selection, and (3) organizational policies and procedures that are likely to affect recruitment efforts (for example, pay and working conditions). We begin by discussing common practices in these areas. We then discuss innovations being implemented by police agencies around the country. Our review generally focuses on large police agencies such as San Diego's—those that have 500 or more officers or that serve a population of 1 million or more.

As a caveat, we note that there is little evidence with which to evaluate the effects of these policies and practices (and changes therein) on the recruitment of qualified personnel.<sup>5</sup> Hence, it is difficult to definitively identify best practices that will yield more recruits. Nonetheless, we consider some ways in which police departments might improve recruitment, based on the limited available research and the opinions of practitioners and other experts. We begin with a review of research on military recruiting, where greater investments have been made in learning about cost-effective recruiting practices.

## Lessons from Military-Recruiting Research

RAND researchers have used the framework described in Chapter One to analyze military recruiting and assisted the United States' armed forces in optimizing their recruiting efforts (see Asch and

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<sup>5</sup> Although numerous studies have investigated factors that influence the size of police agencies, few of these inquiries have considered how the policies and practices of police agencies might affect their staffing levels. Instead, these studies have tended to focus on demand for police services, availability of resources, and social conflict linked to the size of disadvantaged groups. To illustrate, a recent review of nearly 40 studies of police staffing revealed only four that examined the impact of police wages on staffing levels (Maguire, 2001). A more recent study that tested the impact of specific recruiting practices on hiring underrepresented populations is discussed later.

Orvis, 1994, and Orvis and Asch, 2001, for reviews of the literature). Military-manpower researchers have estimated “how much extra must be expended on each of several recruiting resources to gain an additional high-quality recruit—the marginal cost of each of the recruiting resources” (Asch and Orvis, 1994, p. 22). Table 2.1 shows the relative cost of getting an additional high-quality recruit<sup>6</sup> using different types of recruiting resources, with the reference resource being educational benefits for enlistees. These estimates show that the marginal costs for providing educational benefits, adding more recruiters, and increasing advertising expenditures are similar, while increasing enlistment bonuses and increasing entry-level pay cost significantly more. That is, an additional \$5.00 spent on increasing pay will likely have the same effect on the number of recruits as one additional dollar spent on educational benefits, recruiters, or advertising.

It is important to note that the effectiveness of advertising varies at different levels of expenditure and across different media. There are

**Table 2.1**  
**Estimated Marginal Cost of a High-Quality Recruit**  
**Using Alternative Recruiting Resources**

Recruiting Resource	Relative Marginal Cost
Educational benefits for enlistees	1.00
Recruiters	1.04
Advertising	1.16
Enlistment bonuses	2.66
Entry basic pay	4.97

SOURCE: Based on data from Asch and Orvis (1994, p. 23).

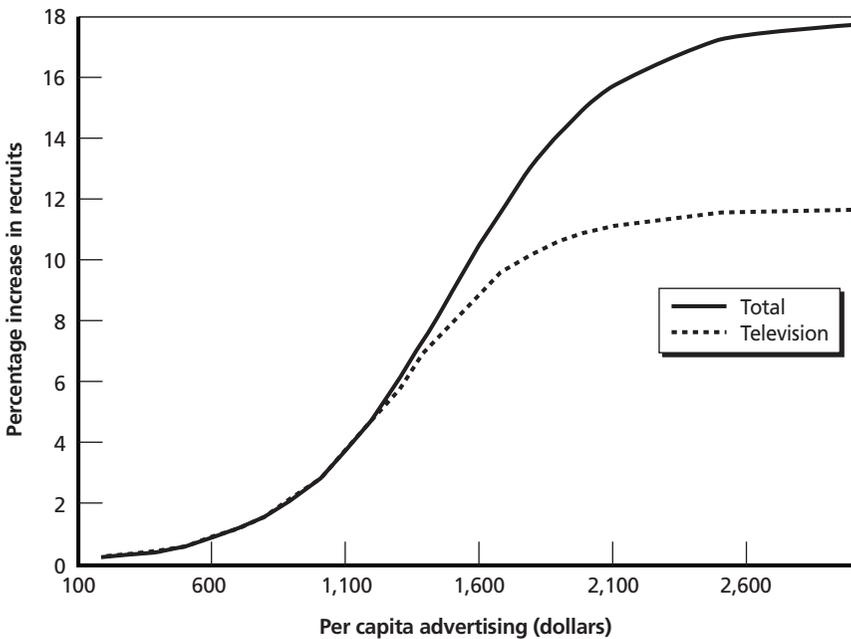
NOTE: Relative marginal cost represents the percentage increase in cost of the recruiting resource to gain a high-quality recruit relative to educational benefits to achieve the same quality in an enlistee. The cost for educational benefits was estimated in 1994 to be \$7,000.

<sup>6</sup> The military defines a “high-quality recruit” as one who has scored in the top 50 percent on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT) and has graduated from high school.

“threshold levels of advertising activity below which advertising has essentially no impact, and saturation levels of advertising activity above which additional activity has essentially no impact” (Dertouzos and Garber, 2003, p. xiv). This is known in advertising literature as “an ‘S-curve’ because a plot of sales versus advertising intensity has the shape of . . . an elongated and tilted ‘S’” (Dertouzos and Garber, 2003, p. xiv). Figure 2.2 shows this relationship for the U.S. Army. First of all, it shows that the U.S. Army gains a higher return for its advertising expenditure as the level of the expenditure increases. Second, regardless of the level of advertising budget, for the Army, television advertising is relatively cost-effective compared to other media.

Therefore, the relative marginal cost of advertising compared to other recruiting resources must be evaluated depending on where

**Figure 2.1**  
**Differential Impact of Advertising Resources on Numbers of U.S. Army Recruits**



SOURCE: Dertouzos and Garber (2003, Table 8.3).

RAND MG724-2.1

the advertising intensity is on the S-curve. If the advertising intensity is below a critical threshold to have some impact on the number of recruits, the department will be better off investing in alternative recruiting resources to increase that number.

Additional recruiting resources do increase the number of recruits. But recruiter and resource management is essential to reap the full benefits of increased resources. For instance, Asch and Orvis (1994) estimated that,

when a resource such as advertising is increased to obtain a 10 percent increase in high-quality enlistments, the [U.S. military] recruiting command will get only a 7 percent increase (or 70 percent of its target) if it does not simultaneously increase the recruiter's high-quality enlistment quota. (Asch and Orvis, 1994, p. 23)

In fact, Dertouzos and Garber wrote, “effective [recruiter-management] policies . . . increase [U.S. Army] enlistments for little, if any, additional cost” (Dertouzos and Garber, 2006, p. xv). Recruiter-management policies and practices include “personnel selection and training, recruiter assignment, performance measurement, and the design of incentive systems that motivate recruiters to be more productive” (Dertouzos and Garber, 2006, p. xv). Some of the key findings from their study provide valuable insights for SDPD:

1. It is important to develop a record on recruiter attributes and their productivity, as some recruiter attributes are highly predictive of recruiter productivity. Understanding these attributes is essential to develop an effective human resource–management system.
2. Recruiters with experience in coveted positions are more productive than recruiters from support occupations. For SDPD, these coveted positions may be investigative positions or harbor patrol, roles that intrigue prospective recruits.
3. Recruiters tend to perform well when they are likely to relate to the pool of potential recruits, working areas where the local

population is similar in socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds or actually recruiting from their own communities.

## Recruitment and Marketing Efforts

Recruiting practices in police agencies were recently examined in a national survey conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) (Taylor et al., 2005). Among agencies having 500 or more officers, nearly all (90 percent) are responsible for their own recruiting, and about three-quarters (76 percent) do their own advertising (see Taylor et al., 2005, pp. 77–98). Sixty percent have a recruitment unit with permanent assignments. On average, these units have about seven officers, one or two civilians, and a budget of around \$62,000.

The most common venues through which large agencies recruit are local newspapers (88 percent), walk-ins (78 percent), the Internet (74 percent), local community events (74 percent), events at local colleges (71 percent), local career fairs (70 percent), local high-school events (66 percent), local television and radio ads (53 and 57 percent, respectively), local posters (57 percent), and local or in-state military installations (53 and 49 percent, respectively). Agencies report that their recruitment efforts commonly target racial and ethnic minorities (74 percent), women (66 percent), college graduates (63 percent), military veterans (54 percent), and people with prior police experience (53 percent). Eighty-three percent also report using the Explorer program, youth athletic leagues, and other such efforts to interest youth in law-enforcement careers.<sup>7</sup>

There is little evidence with which to judge the intensity of these efforts (for example, how often recruiters attend career fairs) or their effectiveness. In a survey of state police agencies, however, recruiters rated Internet job notices, career fairs, and visits to military bases and colleges as the most successful strategies (Whetstone, Reed, and Turner,

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<sup>7</sup> Police Explorer programs connect young men and women between 14 and 21 years of age with local police departments and provide special training to prepare them for careers in law enforcement.

2006). Further, television advertising and community visits seemed to enhance recruitment of racial and ethnic minorities.

Other evidence also suggests that the Internet and employee referrals are particularly important. In California, for example, police recruits report having been recruited to police jobs most commonly through self-referral (43 percent), the Internet (36 percent), or an employee of the agency (44 percent), who often was a friend or relative (POST, 2006, p. 33).

### **New Developments in Marketing and Recruitment**

Accounts suggest that police agencies are innovating in a number of ways with respect to marketing and recruitment. One is by expanding the geographic reach of their marketing efforts. As discussed, most agencies focus on local advertising and recruitment efforts. However, some agencies expand these efforts to other parts of their state and region and sometimes to other parts of the country. This is done in a variety of ways. The Internet, of course, provides an obvious means of advertising throughout the nation. Three-quarters of large agencies report advertising nationally through the Internet (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 82). Other means include television, newspapers, magazines and journals, career fairs, and recruitment trips. Among agencies with 500 or more officers, for example, 37 percent advertise statewide through newspapers, 26 percent advertise regionally through newspapers, and 16 percent advertise nationally through newspapers (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 81). To provide another illustration, 53 percent of large agencies recruit statewide at college events, 43 percent recruit regionally at college events, and 12 percent recruit nationally at college events (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 82).

Reports suggest that statewide, regional, and national recruitment efforts are becoming more prevalent and aggressive. Examples abound in media accounts: Dallas police recruiting in New York (Zimmerman, 2006), Seattle police recruiting in New York (White, 2008b), Denver police recruiting in Detroit (Zimmerman, 2006), Phoenix police recruiting in Los Angeles (McGreevy, 2006), Los Angeles police recruiting in Chicago (McGreevy, 2006), and Baltimore police recruiting in Puerto Rico (Fuller, 2007). Interstate recruiters often tout the

advantages of their agency or jurisdiction, emphasizing such issues as salary, signing bonuses (which, as discussed later, seem to have become more common), quality of life (including lower crime rates), and housing prices. In some cases, recruiters have strategically targeted their efforts on areas that have experienced police layoffs or that have depressed economies.

Police agencies are also trying to improve the creativity and quality of their advertising and recruiting efforts. Accounts have described departments recruiting in a wide variety of venues, including stadiums, beaches, military bases, job fairs, athletic clubs, farmers' markets, and events in the minority, immigrant, and gay and lesbian communities (see, e.g., Kaempffer, 2007; Taylor et al., 2005; Zimmerman, 2006). Agencies are also increasingly targeting venues for women, including various forums, clubs, organizations, and athletic events, such as collegiate women's sporting events (see, e.g., Taylor et al., 2005). Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) recruiters have been certified by the city personnel office to offer the written test themselves. This has allowed LAPD recruiters to enroll an interested applicant on the spot wherever they are and get the candidate through the first major hurdle in the process.

Further, some agencies have hired advertising firms to help with recruitment. For example, advertising campaigns in such places as Boston, New York, and Tampa have featured officers engaged in a variety of policing activities (e.g., working with youth, taking crime-scene photos) and giving testimonials about policing and the agency. Where documented, the effectiveness of these ad campaigns has been mixed.<sup>8</sup> Atlanta is among the latest to seek advertising-agency help to formulate a brand (Eberly, 2008).

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., POST (2006), Salvatore (2001), Smalley (2007), Swope (1999), Taylor et al. (2005), and Zimmerman (2006). In Hillsborough County, Florida, for instance, professionally produced television commercials and other promotional efforts were credited with helping to increase racial and ethnic minority applications by 5 percent over 180 days (POST, 2006, p. 68; also see Scrivner, 2006). In contrast, reports suggest that advertising campaigns in New York City have produced mixed results (Swope, 1999, cited in Taylor et al., 2005, p. 6; Zimmerman, 2006).

There are also signs that police managers are placing more emphasis on recruitment throughout their organizations. As noted, referrals from existing officers are an important source of new recruits. Experts thus recommend that police managers stress the importance of recruitment to all employees and, at a minimum, provide employees with informational materials that they can distribute to potential recruits (e.g., POST, 2006). Roughly one-third (30 percent) of agencies with 500 or more officers provide rewards for employees who refer successful applicants (Taylor et al., 2005). These incentives may come in the form of bonuses or vacation time. The King County (Wash.) Sheriff's Office, for instance, provides 40 extra hours of vacation time to deputies who refer successful recruits (Egan, 2005). In Los Angeles, the city awards \$500 to any city employee who brings in a police recruit who makes it through the academy; the referrer gets another \$500 if the recruit becomes a sworn officer (Egan, 2005).

Accounts also suggest that agencies are increasingly turning to partnerships of various sorts to improve recruitment. About 43 percent of large agencies (those with 500 or more officers) engage in joint recruitment efforts with other agencies at least occasionally (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 83). The importance of having strong partnerships with other institutions (e.g., colleges, high schools, the military) and with community actors is also recognized (see, e.g., POST, 2006). Community partnerships may be particularly helpful in recruitment of minorities. Some agencies actively involve community leaders, such as local clergy and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) officials, in recruitment efforts. Reports describe community leaders assisting with outreach and advertising, serving on advisory boards, helping to mentor and tutor prospective recruits, and even participating in officer selection (for examples, see Taylor et al., 2005). One oft-cited program is in Sacramento, where selected community representatives are trained as police recruiters (POST, 2006; also see Scrivner, 2006). After taking part in training that includes a three-hour class, community representatives work with the police recruiters in various ways, staffing recruitment booths, nominating and mentoring recruits, and participating in oral testing of recruits. As of 2006, more than 220 community representatives had participated.

## Officer Selection

According to data compiled in 2003 by the U.S. Department of Justice (Hickman and Reaves, 2003), virtually all of the nation's very largest police agencies—those serving a population of 1 million or more—use a personal interview, medical exam, drug test, psychological evaluation, and physical-ability test in officer screening (each of these procedures is used by at least 94 percent of the largest agencies). It is also common for these agencies to use written aptitude tests (81 percent), polygraph tests (81 percent), or personality inventories (56 percent). Further, all conduct a criminal-record check, background investigation, and driving-record check on applicants, and a substantial majority (81 percent) do a credit history check.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of educational requirements, only 1 percent of the largest agencies require applicants to have a four-year college degree (Hickman and Reaves, 2003). Nearly three-quarters require only a high-school degree, while 18 percent require some college, and 7 percent require a two-year degree.

Taylor et al. (2005) examined other background requirements and selection procedures for police agencies. Among agencies with 500 or more officers, 76 percent have age-range restrictions for new recruits (discussed in the next section). Forty-three percent use special entry conditions (such as preference points or credits), typically for military veterans and former police officers. Nearly two-thirds allow lateral transfers from other police agencies at the entry-level rank. Many agencies, 41 percent, require officers to live in the service area.

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<sup>9</sup> Among all agencies serving populations of 250,000 or more, similar percentages use these various techniques. The 1973 National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals recommended that police agencies use oral interviews, background checks, physical examinations, and psychological tests (for cognitive ability and personality) in selecting officers (Langworthy, 1995).

### **New Developments in Officer Selection**

To increase the pool of eligible applicants, police agencies have relaxed some of their screening and selection criteria over the past two decades (Langworthy, 1995; Taylor et al., 2005). Among a sample of 60 of the nation's largest police agencies, the percentage requiring a "clean" criminal record dropped from 52 percent in 1989 to 33 percent in 2002 (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 102). Only 39 percent of agencies of 500 or more officers currently disqualify applicants for having any prior felony arrests, and only 24 percent do so for any prior drug use.<sup>10</sup> These patterns and trends seem to represent adaptations by police agencies to high levels of casual drug use among young people.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, agencies draw the line at convictions for felonies (95 percent), serious misdemeanors (88 percent), or drug violations (51 percent); a suspended driver's license (90 percent); felony arrests, drug-abuse arrests, or excessive points on one's driver's license received during the preceding two years (49, 57, and 66 percent, respectively); or a record of prior termination from a law-enforcement agency (53 percent) (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 93).

Reports also indicate that many agencies have also changed their physical and age requirements. Over the past few decades, police have dropped stand-alone height and weight requirements in favor of physical requirements emphasizing overall fitness, agility, and height in relation to weight.<sup>12</sup> The revised requirements are deemed more relevant to performance and less discriminatory toward women and particular racial and ethnic minority groups. However, some agencies have made further modifications to their physical requirements. For example, the City of Long Beach (Calif.) Police Department opted to discontinue its dummy-lift test, which required recruits to lift a weighted dummy onto

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor et al. (2005). Candidates are asked to report past and present drug use. They are polygraphed, and detectives complete investigations with friends and neighbors. To our knowledge, there have been no comparisons of the performance of officers with and without histories of minor crime and known drug use.

<sup>11</sup> Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman (2002, p. 81) estimated that, in 2001, between 51 percent and 57 percent of high-school seniors had used illicit drugs at some point in their lives.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor et al. (2005) estimated that 0.3 percent of agencies have height or weight requirements.

a platform after a rescue drag because many otherwise qualified female candidates could not pass the test. Police management determined that it was not imperative for police work (Raymond et al., 2005, p. 17).

Some agencies, including those in New York City and Chicago, have lowered their minimum age requirement for applicants, despite some evidence that younger recruits are more likely to have later disciplinary problems (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 9). Some have also increased the maximum age for new applicants. Currently, the average minimum allowable age is around 20, and the average maximum allowable age is about 40 (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 89).

There have also been changes in the use of testing in large agencies. Since 1989, the use of written tests and intelligence tests has reportedly declined, while the use of psychological interviews and drug tests has increased (Taylor et al., 2005). The particulars of these changes have not been well documented, but they may be due to concerns that certain types of written tests are not sufficiently job-related and that they result in the disproportionate loss of underrepresented candidates, who on average may not have received the same quality of schooling as other candidates.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, agencies are finding ways to assist applicants with various tests and to otherwise ease the application and screening process. Examples include the following:

- efforts to help candidates prepare for physical-fitness requirements. These may include, for instance, running practice physical tests, offering guest passes at local gyms, pairing candidates with fitness coaches, and instituting other pre-academy fitness programs.
- helping candidates prepare for written tests. Forty percent of large agencies provide reference or study materials automatically or on request (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 88). Agencies may also offer prequalification tests (sometimes online) and provide other forms of educational assistance, such as remedial training in English.

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<sup>13</sup> A cautionary note is that an earlier survey with the same group of agencies found that the use of intelligence tests increased from 1990 to 1994 (Langworthy, 1995). The more recent results may reflect a reversal of this trend, but they may also reflect changes in how the respondents interpreted the questions over time.

Some evidence suggests that providing practice tests online may boost recruitment among underrepresented populations (Whetstone, Reed, and Turner, 2006).

- allowing delayed completion of educational requirements or the substitution of military service
- dropping residency requirements or providing a grace period for candidates to move into the jurisdiction
- improving the convenience and speed of the application and selection process. This could occur in various ways: ensuring that the agency Web site has pertinent information about various job roles, requirements, procedures, and dates; providing and accepting online applications; offering off-site testing or offering tests at times that are convenient for applicants (such as evenings and weekends); and finding other ways to expedite the application process, which typically takes 17 weeks in large agencies (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 89), for all applicants or particularly for those with prior police experience.<sup>14</sup>
- establishing mentoring programs in which experienced officers help guide candidates through the application and training process. This is thought to be particularly helpful in the recruitment of underrepresented populations, and some evidence suggests that it may in fact improve their representation (Whetstone, Reed, and Turner, 2006).

## Other Organizational Policies and Practices Affecting Recruitment and Hiring

Other organizational policies and practices that may affect recruitment and hiring include those pertaining to salary, scheduling, promotional opportunities, and other working conditions. Of these issues,

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<sup>14</sup> On a related note, other factors may affect the speed of the hiring process and its convenience for applicants. For example, two-thirds of large agencies accept applications continuously, and 54 percent of those requiring a written test provide the opportunity to take the test at least once a month (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 88). Lists of qualified applicants remain valid for 15 months, on average.

salary and other financial incentives have received the most attention. In 2003, for agencies serving populations of 250,000 or more, starting police salaries average in the \$36,000 to \$38,000 range (Hickman and Reaves, 2003) but can vary widely (for example, New York City's starting police salary in 2006 was \$32,700, while that for Oakland, California, was \$69,000; see McGreevy, 2006). Adjusting for inflation, salaries increased 4 percent in large agencies from 2000 to 2003.<sup>15</sup> However, other evidence shows that police salaries lagged behind inflation over the longer period of 1989 to 2002.<sup>16</sup>

In a 2003 survey of the very largest agencies (those serving a population of 1 million or more), 75 to 81 percent authorize special pay for tuition reimbursement, education incentives, and shift differentials (Hickman and Reaves, 2003). Roughly one-half to two-thirds of these agencies also offer special pay for merit, special skills, bilingual ability, and hazardous duty. Taylor et al. (2005) fielded a survey in 2002 and found that, among all agencies with 500 or more officers, other common incentives and bonuses included a uniform allowance (94 percent), a paid academy salary (71 percent), a salary increase for a college degree (43 percent), unlimited overtime (75 percent), and use of a take-home car (32 percent). Table 2.2 summarizes incentives and bonuses found in this and other studies.

Other financial incentives include bonuses for employee referrals (discussed previously), signing bonuses for new officers, and assistance with housing costs (i.e., discount mortgages, home loans, or down payments). As of 2002, only 3 to 4 percent of large agencies provided signing bonuses (which averaged less than \$1,000), and about 5 percent provided assistance with housing costs (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 95). Media accounts, however, suggest that the prevalence and value of such incentives may be growing. Police agencies in Dallas, Houston, and

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<sup>15</sup> Starting pay also tends to be higher in agencies with collective bargaining (Hickman and Reaves, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Taylor et al. (2005, p. 32). A recent review of research on police staffing (Koper, Maguire, and Moore, 2001) revealed only four studies that have examined the impact of police wages on staffing. Those four studies, which were based on data from the 1960s and 1970s, produced mixed findings and thus fail to provide definitive evidence as to whether higher salaries boost recruitment.

**Table 2.2**  
**Summary of Additional Organizational Policies and Practices**

Type of Agency	Policy or Practice	Percentage of Agencies Offering
Serving more than 1 million people	Tuition reimbursement	81
	Education incentive	75
	Special pay for hazardous duty	69
	Special pay for special skills	56
	Special pay for bilingual ability	50
	Special pay for merit	44
More than 500 officers	Uniform allowance	94
	Unlimited overtime	75
	Paid academy salary	71
	Allow lateral hires from other agencies	62
	Salary increase for college degree	43
	Take-home car	32
	Assistance with housing costs	5
Signing bonus	3	

San Diego County have reportedly offered signing bonuses ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000 (Egan, 2005; Smalley, 2007; Zimmerman, 2006). Similarly, police in Lexington (Ky.), Phoenix, and St. Petersburg (Fla.) have offered home loans or down payments worth \$7,400 to \$14,000 (D. Lee, 2007).

Various other organizational policies and practices may also affect recruitment. Among others, practitioners and experts cite the following: an agency's policy on lateral transfers (allowed by 62 percent of large agencies; Taylor et al., 2005, p. 78); programs that provide opportunities for prospective recruits to serve in an auxiliary, volunteer, intern, or other similar capacity before joining the agency; designation of permanent recruiters and special committees or working groups to address recruiting issues; promotional opportunities and the existence

of multiple career tracks within the agency; flexibility in scheduling and assignments (for example, only 3 to 4 percent of large agencies allow job sharing and split shifts, and only 2 percent provide scheduling preferences for college; Taylor et al., 2005, p. 95); and the agency's retirement age.

## **Characteristics of Police Recruits**

As noted earlier, there is little empirical evidence with which to assess the effectiveness of practices in police recruitment and hiring. More systematic documentation and testing of these practices are certainly needed. At the same time, efforts to improve recruitment and hiring in policing would undoubtedly be facilitated by knowing more about the types of people who are most likely to become police officers and the process by which they choose a law-enforcement career. Additionally, it would be helpful to understand why other people choose not to pursue a law-enforcement career so that police administrators can consider ways to target the marketing of police work. Research on these matters, though quite limited, does provide some insights.

### **Characteristics, Motivations, and Experiences of Recruits**

Although police officers are most likely to be male and white, motivations for becoming a police officer seem to be fairly similar across demographic groups. A survey of recruits in New York City found that the leading motivations for selecting a law-enforcement career, regardless of race or gender, tended to be the opportunity to help people in the community, job security, job benefits (i.e., medical, pension), and opportunities for career advancement (Raganella and White, 2004). Other studies (POST, 2006; Lord and Friday, 2003) also suggest that recruits are motivated by an altruistic desire to serve society and by practical considerations, such as job stability and benefits—though not necessarily by salary (on the latter point, see Raganella and White, 2004). The potential excitement and adventure of police work also appear to be a moderate to strong motivator for many recruits (POST,

2006; Raganella and White, 2004), though, as discussed later, stereotypes in this regard may dissuade some people from policing.

Future police recruits often develop an interest in policing early in life. In a survey of recruits throughout California (POST, 2006), 50 to 57 percent indicated that they were interested in a law-enforcement career by the end of high school, and 17 to 20 percent indicated that they were interested by the end of elementary school. Evidence also suggests that parental support for a law-enforcement career and neighborhood perceptions of the police, positive and negative, can be important influences on the decision to seek police work (Kaminski, 1993).

In terms of finding and selecting police jobs, recruits in a recent California survey indicated that they had commonly learned about jobs through a police employee (44 percent), who often was a friend or relative, or through the Internet (36 percent) (POST, 2006, p. 33). To prepare for police work, recruits often exercised (92 percent), talked with an officer (78 percent), or did a ride-along (62 percent). About a third (32 percent) did volunteer work with the police.

The agency's reputation, the variety of possible assignments, and the agency's location were among the leading factors that influenced recruits' decision to accept a job offer. More than 50 percent of the recruits felt strongly, however, that the length of the application process was a problem. Lack of contact from the agency during the process was also one of the most commonly cited difficulties.

### **Characteristics, Motivations, and Experiences of Those Less Likely to Become Police Officers**

Research and expert opinion also suggest a number of important features about people who are less inclined to join a police department. College graduates, for one, are underrepresented among police. This is generally attributed to the fact that college graduates have more employment options, typically more lucrative ones. However, according to the American Community Survey (ACS), in the San Diego metropolitan area, the median salary of an employed white male college

graduate<sup>17</sup> between 25 and 29 years old is \$50,500, in the lower half of the SDPD's Police Officer I salary scale (\$47,000 to \$57,000). Even those 30–34 years old have a median salary that is in the low end of the Police Officer II<sup>18</sup> salary range (\$60,000 to \$73,000).

Studies contrasting police recruits with young students suggest that the latter place greater emphasis on wages and tend to have more negative views of certain working conditions associated with policing, particularly shift work (unusual hours), potential danger, and working outdoors (Lord and Friday, 2003). Some evidence suggests that overestimation of the danger involved in policing—both by young potential recruits and by the parents who may influence their occupational choices—dissuades some people from police work (Kaminski, 1993; Lord and Friday, 2003). Hence, a stereotyped perception of police work as the dangerous pursuit of violent criminals could be somewhat detrimental to recruitment efforts. Compared to police recruits, students also seem to have less appreciation for the full range of work involved in policing (Lord and Friday, 2003). In particular, they have less awareness of the service, communication, and prevention aspects of policing.<sup>19</sup>

More generally, it is believed that today's younger workers are less likely to choose policing as an occupation because they desire employment options that provide more promotional opportunities; more flexibility in scheduling and greater life/work balance; more autonomy, independence, and input into decisionmaking; greater alignment with their skills and interests; and a more rapid selection process (see, e.g., POST, 2006; Charrier, 2000; Mineard, 2003; Taylor et al., 2005). There are also concerns that a smaller proportion of them are qualified

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<sup>17</sup> We selected this group because they have the highest median salary. Comparison to the general population, which naturally includes those unemployed, would be even more favorable to SDPD salaries.

<sup>18</sup> An officer advances to the Police Officer II rank after three years of satisfactory performance at SDPD or by having prior law-enforcement experience.

<sup>19</sup> Though some evidence suggests that they are also less interested in these tasks than are people who choose a policing career (Lord and Friday, 2003).

for police work due to relatively high levels of drug use, indebtedness, and obesity (Raymond et al., 2005).

The underrepresentation of women and racial and ethnic minorities in policing raises additional issues. These groups are generally believed to have more negative perceptions of the climate and culture of police agencies. Moreover, evidence from a recent national survey suggests that targeted recruitment strategies (defined generically) and special entry conditions for these populations often fail to produce desired results.<sup>20</sup>

Women in particular are highly underrepresented among police applicants (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 106). Women generally view policing as a male-dominated profession, and they may view this as a barrier to entry (Lord and Friday, 2003). They also express concerns about sexual harassment and promotional opportunities. Female recruits tend to put a higher premium on the latter than do male recruits (Raganella and White, 2004). Potential female recruits may also have greater concerns about the danger of working alone and such issues as family leave (POST, 2006). Further, they appear to have greater difficulties with the physical testing required of recruits. On the other hand, prospects for recruiting college-educated women may be somewhat greater than those for recruiting college-educated men. Some evidence indicates that agencies have more female hires when they require applicants to have a college degree (Taylor et al., 2005, pp. 36–40). Also, a recent survey of police recruits in California found that female recruits had more college education than did their male counterparts (POST, 2006, p. 34).

Racial- and ethnic-minority recruitment seems to raise a different problem in that large agencies generally have proportional representation of these groups among all applicants but not among qualified applicants (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 106). Consequently, there is a need both to attract better-qualified minority candidates and to help under-

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor et al. (2005, pp. 35–42). A caveat is that these findings were based on a small sample of roughly 200 to 260 agencies of varying sizes nationwide. Attrition rates were especially high for this analysis, and the agencies on which these conclusions were based may not be representative of police agencies generally.

qualified candidates from underrepresented populations reach the necessary standards. In addition, it seems that potential recruits from these populations are not hired in proportion to their representation among the pool of qualified applicants, which suggests that qualified racial and ethnic minorities are either screened out or choosing to exit the process in disproportionate numbers.

Studies consistently show that blacks, and, to a lesser extent, other racial and ethnic minorities, have more negative views of the police (National Research Council, 2004; also see Kaminski, 1993), and naturally this decreases the propensity of these youth to join law enforcement (Kaminski, 1993). Perceptions of the number of black police officers also seem to have some effect on the willingness of black youth to seek police employment (Kaminski, 1993). However, a survey of recruiters at state police agencies indicated that these organizations believed that racial and ethnic minority representation may be enhanced by television advertising, community recruitment visits, the availability of practice tests on an agency's Web site, and mentoring programs for new recruits (Whetstone, Reed, and Turner, 2006).

### **Implications for Improving Recruitment and Hiring**

This discussion of the varied appeal of police work among different demographic groups has several implications for efforts to improve police recruitment, some of which underscore points raised earlier in our review of recruitment and selection practices. As noted by others, police departments can enhance their recruitment efforts in the following ways:

- In marketing and advertisement efforts, emphasize the service aspects of policing. This may be especially helpful in recruiting women, who tend to stress service more than men do (Raganella and White, 2004). Also emphasize the variety of tasks and skills involved in police work and the career paths available in policing.
- Communicate SDPD's competitiveness in starting salaries. For some candidates, salaries in policing are comparatively low, particularly in some cities. San Diego may have lower salaries than

even some neighboring agencies (SDPD and Buck Consultants, 2006), though these reported differences are quickly obsolete, with several of the reported salaries having been renegotiated in the intervening years. In absolute dollars, police departments pay quite well compared to other opportunities available to those with a high-school diploma as the highest level of education. The current starting salaries at SDPD range from \$47,000 to \$57,000, a message that has not yet permeated the community. In the San Diego area, even employed college graduates are not often making these salaries.

- Emphasize other material benefits associated with the occupation, namely, job stability, fringe benefits, and retirement benefits. The dollar value of this package is rarely explained in recruiting materials. Rostker, Hix, and Wilson (2007) noted that the disinterest in retirement benefits for most new recruits could be used to shift future pension dollars to upfront increases in salary.
- Cultivate the interest of youth in law enforcement through programs that allow officers to interact with youth in a positive way and that provide youth with opportunities to work with police (e.g., school resource officer programs, the Explorer program). A related point is to target marketing efforts toward parents and others who influence the career choices of young people.
- Provide or expand opportunities for prospective recruits and youth to work with the agency in an auxiliary, volunteer, or intern capacity.
- Establish an employee referral program and emphasize the importance of recruitment throughout the organization.
- Make effective use of the agency's Web site as a recruiting tool. Experts often recommend that Web sites provide information about jobs, roles, and career paths in the agency; applicant requirements; and the application and testing process (including key dates). Provision of online applicant tests and other instructional aids is often recommended as well.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> A particularly innovative example comes from the United Kingdom, where the national police force's Web site provides information about the roles and duties of officers at all ranks

- Expedite the hiring process where possible and maintain regular contact with applicants throughout the process.
- Consider pre-academy fitness programs and other ways to help recruits meet physical requirements.

Additional measures that may enhance the recruitment of women and racial and ethnic minorities include the following:

- Highlight staff from these populations in advertising efforts and involve them in the recruitment process. Experts also recommend the use of mentoring programs in which experienced female and racial- and ethnic-minority officers are paired with new female and racial- and ethnic-minority recruits.
- To improve recruitment of women in particular, consider focusing more efforts on college graduates and on locations that have more highly educated populations.
- Devote a section of the agency's Web site or other marketing materials to addressing some of the unique concerns of women (for example, sexual harassment and family policies).
- Expand outreach efforts in minority communities. General efforts to improve relations with minority communities have bearing on minority recruitment, as do efforts to actively recruit at events in minority communities. Additionally, some agencies actively involve community leaders, such as local clergy, in various aspects of recruitment efforts.

## Summary

SDPD has already adopted many of the reportedly promising practices in the literature and media accounts. SDPD has a dedicated and diverse recruiting team; offers convenient testing times and locations; is accommodating of distant, minor, youthful indiscretions; offers practice runs through the physical-ability test; has streamlined the recruit-

ing process; is strategically planning outreach beyond the local area; and, most importantly, has maintained a positive and respectful relationship with the community that it serves.

Our review of the literature does reveal several areas in which SDPD can make gains. Many of these are topics of later chapters in this monograph. For example, research indicates that applicants are attracted to police work primarily because of a desire to serve the community and the benefits and stability of police careers. Marketing in brochures, Web sites, and recruiter messaging should give greater emphasis to these aspects of the job rather than the adventure or the requirements and the hurdles of landing an SDPD job. Major departments are utilizing the Internet job sites as well as creating independent Web sites tailored to their recruiting drives. SDPD needs to ensure that its Web site is attractive and convinces visitors to apply. Additionally, the Web site needs to offer preparation materials for the written test. This has been shown to increase the pass rate particularly for nonwhite applicants, addressing both the need for more eligible candidates and diversity issues.

Lastly, bonuses have become more prevalent. Signing bonuses can be inefficient and counterproductive because a large fraction of the officers would have joined even in without a bonus, and current officers will feel slighted. There are some advantages to signing bonuses. They can be applied to everyone or just target recruits (such as lateral hires), they can be varied in size over time, and they can be ceased quickly. They can also get media's and the public's attention. Referral bonuses, on the other hand, share many of these features and can motivate the entire department's staff to join in the recruiting effort. With a staff as diverse as SDPD's, involving them will extend SDPD's recruiting campaign into areas that a limited recruiting staff and advertising budget alone cannot reach. We recommend that SDPD initiate a referral-bonus plan first and, if that does not meet the department's needs, then that plan can be supplemented with targeted and general signing bonuses, if necessary.

A general point to emphasize is the importance of strategic planning in recruitment efforts. Experts often recommend planning for an agency's personnel needs for the next several years (e.g., POST, 2006;

Raymond et al., 2005). Such planning should take into account factors both within the agency (e.g., anticipated retirements) and in the community (e.g., changes in population size and demographics) that are likely to affect the supply and demand for personnel. Agencies should also critically assess their recruiting and hiring processes (POST, 2006). For example, what advertising methods are producing the best results? How did recent recruits learn about the agency and why did they choose the agency? Where does most attrition occur in the selection and hiring process? Why do people stay or leave the organization? Such assessments can be conducted through surveys of new recruits, surveys of departing officers, and other means.

The next chapters of this monograph provide details of the topics covered in this chapter with a focus specifically on SDPD. First, we review the features of law-enforcement careers, and SDPD specifically, that are attracting current applicants.



## **Applicants' Motivations for a Law-Enforcement Career and SDPD Employment**

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### **Introduction**

Chapter Two examined practices in police recruitment and hiring by law-enforcement administrations across the United States, looking specifically at their recruitment and marketing efforts, methods of officer selection, and related organizational policies and procedures. This chapter examines the current pool of applicants for law-enforcement careers with SDPD and profiles their demographic characteristics and motivations for seeking SDPD jobs. The chapter starts with a section describing the survey research design and continues with three other sections analyzing the survey responses on applicants' motivations to seek employment in law enforcement, their reasons for seeking employment in SDPD, and finally, their former military experiences.

### **Survey Research Design**

SDPD worked with RAND to develop five new questions for inclusion in the survey that is ordinarily administered to SDPD written-test takers. These survey questions were designed to inform two general questions: (1) why individuals choose to pursue a career as a law-enforcement officer and (2) why test takers are considering a job with SDPD in particular. Because veterans and military personnel constitute a sizable portion of the San Diego labor market, we also use these questions as an opportunity to better understand the presence of veterans and military personnel in the SDPD applicant pool.

The first survey question asked, which of a list of items was *most* important in your decision to pursue a career in law enforcement? The list of choices was adapted from the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) survey of recent police-officer recruits. The items listed were as follows:

- stable employment
- salary and benefits
- nonroutine work
- retirement plan
- independence/work without supervision
- adventure/excitement
- status/pride of being a peace officer
- desire to help others/serve community
- other (please specify).

The second and third questions listed the same items and asked respondents to select the second and third most important in their decision, respectively. We compiled answers from all three questions. We report the proportion of respondents who listed an item as among their three most important items. This allows us to gauge the relative magnitude of an item's importance in general better than merely tabulating the most cited item from a single list.

To better understand why applicants initially chose to apply for a job with SDPD, the fourth question presented respondents with a list of items and asked them, which one first prompted you to start thinking about a job with SDPD? The items listed were as follows:

- friend/relative in law enforcement
- announcement on employment Web site (such as Monster or craigslist)
- friend/relative not in law enforcement
- SDPD at career/job fair
- career counselor
- advertisement in print, TV, or Web media

- news story about SDPD
- other (please specify).

Finally, because military employment is such a large factor in San Diego's labor market, we suspected that a sizable number of SDPD applicants would have some links to the military (i.e., either they were currently on active duty and considering a career change, or they were assigned to the San Diego area while in the military and remained after their discharge rather than return to their home of record). Of SDPD written-test takers, 22 percent reported a home ZIP Code™ outside San Diego County. One-third of that 22 percent were from somewhere other than California, and some unknown portion of the 22 percent may actually reside in San Diego on a semitransient basis. Knowing more about the number of military applicants could inform recruiting outreach efforts into labor markets around the country to the extent that sizable pools of nonresident labor can be accessed locally. Current or former military personnel may also differ from nonveterans in their motivations for police work. However, to our knowledge, these issues have not yet been addressed for SDPD applicants. We therefore included a fifth question that asked respondents to describe which statement best characterized their active-duty military experience:

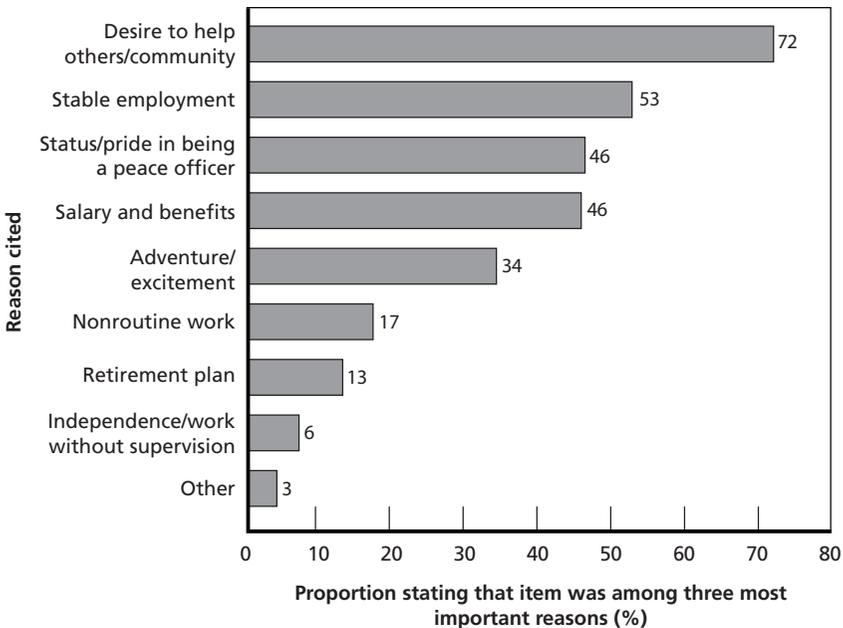
- I am currently on active duty.
- My last day of active-duty military service was within the past 12 months.
- My last day of active-duty military service was more than 12 months ago.
- I have never been on active duty in the military.

Applicants were instructed to exclude reserve and National Guard mobilizations and deployments.

## Reasons for a Career in Law Enforcement

We received surveys from 234 SDPD applicants from November 2007, a response rate of 94 percent. Figure 3.1 shows the relative importance of items for respondents' decisions to pursue a career in law enforcement. A large majority—72 percent—cited a desire to help others and serve the community as one of the three most important reasons for a law-enforcement career. The proportion choosing this category was more than one-third larger than the proportion choosing any of the next three items: stable employment, the status or pride of being a peace officer, or salary and benefits. While the range of responses for these items was between 46 and 53 percent, their relative importance was statistically indistinguishable; that is, the slight differences we observed may be due to chance and the sample of responses we happened to receive. Looking

**Figure 3.1**  
**Most Important Items for Respondents' Decisions to Pursue a Law-Enforcement Career**



only at the question about a respondents' *single* most important item does not change the rankings of these four items. Taken together, 83 percent of respondents listed one of these four items as most important to their decision to pursue a law-enforcement career.

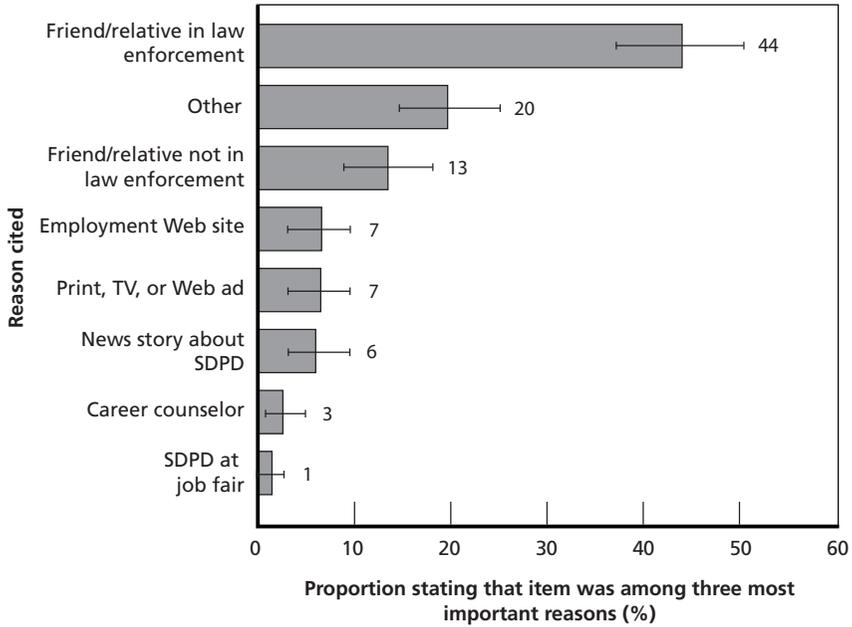
One-third of respondents reported that adventure and excitement was among their top three reasons for a law-enforcement career, 17 percent cited a desire for nonroutine work, and 13 percent cited retirement benefits. Only about 6 percent cited the independent nature of police work. The very small number of people who cited an unlisted item provides evidence that the list largely exhausts the possible categories of reasons that people consider a career in law enforcement.

## The Decision to Apply with SDPD

Figure 3.2 illustrates responses to the question about what first prompted a test taker to start thinking about a job with SDPD. Taken together, the first and third bars show that a majority (57 percent) first began considering SDPD based on interactions with friends or relatives. Of these, more than three-quarters identified that person as someone in law enforcement. Social contacts with those outside of test takers' personal social networks—career counselors and SDPD employees at job fairs—are comparatively unimportant. On the other hand, marketing and public-relations efforts (Web sites, advertising, news stories) collectively account for nearly 20 percent of responses, with no meaningful differences in the response proportions for each item.

Nearly 20 percent of test takers reported that an unlisted item first prompted their interest in SDPD. This could signify that respondents did not understand the question very well or that the list was not comprehensive enough to exhaust the possible responses. Very few patterns emerged from a review of write-in comments to this question. Of the 46 written responses, 10 indicated that they had wanted to be a police officer since an early age (4 percent of all responses), but it is not clear when (or why) these respondents specifically made the choice for SDPD. Similarly, another 10 respondents mentioned their college experience with criminal-justice coursework or related

**Figure 3.2**  
**What First Prompted Respondents to Start Thinking About a Job with SDPD?**



NOTE: The lines represent 95-percent confidence intervals for the estimated percentages.

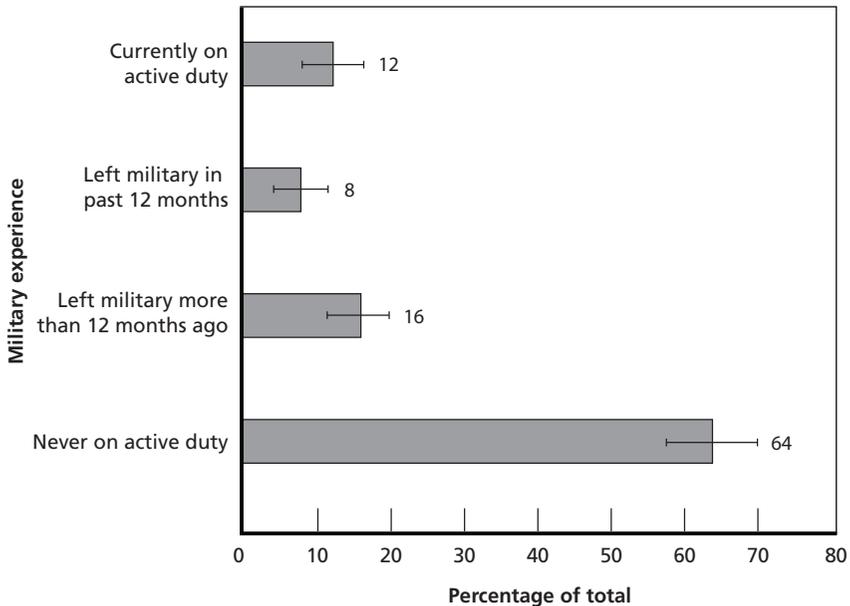
RAND MG724-3.2

curricula or their experience in criminal justice elsewhere (for example, in corrections or a military police specialty). Five respondents mentioned items that could reasonably be categorized as outreach efforts (e.g., SDPD Web site, “SDPD at Carlsbad marathon”). The remaining 23 (10 percent of total responses) could not be categorized in any meaningful way. A large number of these uncategorized responses could be construed as reasons for a law-enforcement career generally (e.g., “curious about the legal system,” “want to get back to ‘military work’”), or that an applicant’s interest in SDPD was self-inspired (of nine of these types of responses, four wrote in a single word, “myself”).

## Military Experience

Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of military experience among SDPD written-test takers. Almost two-thirds of test takers had no military experience at all. Of the remaining one-third with military experience, more than half were currently on active duty or had been discharged within the preceding 12 months (20 percent of all the test takers). The observation that 36 percent of test takers had some active-duty military experience partly reflects the veterans' relatively high interest in police work (see Chapter Two) but also most likely reflects the heavy presence of military installations and personnel in the San Diego region. By comparison, nationally in 2005, only 8 percent of men and 1.6 percent of women aged 20 to 34 were veterans or on active duty.

**Figure 3.3**  
**Military Experience Among SDPD Written-Test Takers**



NOTE: The lines represent 95-percent confidence intervals for the estimated percentages.

Among a national sample of 20- to 34-year-olds with the sex composition observed among SDPD written-test takers earlier in this analysis (roughly 10 percent female), only about 7 percent would be expected to have military experience.<sup>1</sup>

For the most part, veterans and nonveterans did not systematically differ in the importance of reasons for a law-enforcement career. Nonetheless, as shown in Table 3.1, veterans discharged more than 12 months prior to taking the written test (i.e., “earlier veterans”) were more than three times as likely as those with current or recent military experience to cite retirement as a most important item (27 percent compared to 9 percent). Only 10 percent of nonveterans cited retirement as important. Earlier veterans were also only half as likely as nonveterans and current or recent military personnel to cite adventure and excitement as an important reason for a career in law enforcement (19, 39, and 37 percent, respectively). However, these results may reflect age differences rather than time since discharge (i.e., veterans who have been out of the military for more than 12 months may be older than current or recent veterans and the population of test takers as a whole). Nonveterans were generally more likely than those with current or recent military experience and earlier veterans to cite a “desire to help others” as an important reason for a career in law enforcement (77 percent, compared to 65 percent for recent military and earlier

**Table 3.1**  
**Reasons for Considering Law-Enforcement Careers, by Military Status**

Reason Cited	Military Status (%)		
	Recent Veterans	All Veterans	Nonveterans
Retirement	9	27	10
Adventure/ excitement	37	19	39
Desire to help	67	62	77

<sup>1</sup> Estimates of the veteran and military population were calculated using information from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (undated), the U.S. Department of Defense (undated), and the U.S. Department of the Treasury Bureau of Statistics et al. (2006).

veterans combined). Finally, applicants with and without military experience did not differ by what originally prompted them to start thinking about a job with SDPD.

## Summary

Surveys of applicants can give a partial picture of how they are finding out about SDPD and their reasons for considering a job in law enforcement. SDPD regularly surveys applicants on their basic demographics and how they obtained information on the SDPD job. We supplemented those surveys with questions that probed the applicants' initial impetus for considering SDPD. Most importantly, we found that adventure and excitement, featured prominently in some marketing materials, trails well behind a desire to serve the community (perhaps the socially conditioned response) and a desire to have a stable, well-paid job. This suggests that SDPD's marketing, through recruiters, brochures, and Web site, should highlight these aspects of SDPD careers. Despite being a substantial benefit, a retirement plan was rarely mentioned as one of the top three reasons for seeking a law-enforcement career. This suggests that, if recruiting shortfalls persist, allocating later pension benefits to larger starting salaries may be an effective, cost-neutral recruitment incentive (Rostker, Hix, and Wilson, 2007).

While SDPD has known that the majority of applicants use the Internet to learn more about applying, our analysis noted that an online interaction rarely initiates an applicant's interest in SDPD. The vast majority (64 percent) receive the impetus from their social network—their friends and relatives. Importantly, applicants with some military background were no different from nonveterans in this respect. Our focus group with a few applicants found that they came to the test with a group of friends. SDPD can take advantage of this by encouraging its officers and staff to reach into their social networks to promote careers with SDPD. Furthermore, encouraging one person to apply can have a multiplicative effect when that person invites friends and family to join him or her. We recommend financial incentives, as have been used by SDPD's peer agencies, to promote SDPD.

According to the survey results, SDPD recruiters at community events and job fairs are rarely the initial reason applicants consider SDPD. We do not necessarily discount their importance in marketing the department, showing their support of and involvement in the community, and, in fact, generating some recruits.

There are limitations to this survey. First, these supplemental questions were fielded in November 2007. Our conclusions in this chapter assume that applicants in the near future will not be substantially different from those surveyed. Second, about 94 percent of applicants returned completed surveys. By survey standards, such a response rate is sufficiently high to be reasonably confident that any differences between nonresponders and responders are unlikely to materially affect the conclusions, though there is some chance of this occurring. Lastly, and most importantly, surveying only those who apply gives a skewed picture of the potential market for recruits. For example, there may be a population of eligible and potentially interested applicants who have not been reached using current outreach and, therefore, are not represented in our sample. In addition to our recommendations, SDPD should not hesitate to take advantage of unique opportunities that arise that may put it in contact with a new pool of potential applicants.

## **SDPD's Internet Presence**

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### **Introduction**

Chapter Four examined the current pool of applicants for law-enforcement careers with SDPD and profiled their demographic characteristics and motivations for seeking employment in the field of law enforcement in general and with SDPD in particular. This chapter focuses on one specific recruiting mechanism: the Internet. It presents the results of our evaluation of SDPD's Web site with a particular focus on its effectiveness as a recruiting instrument.

### **Research Approach**

This section formally rates the quality of the SDPD recruiting Web page as well as the Web sites of three other major metropolitan police departments in the southwestern United States.

RAND researchers evaluated the recruiting Web pages for SDPD, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD), LAPD, and Phoenix Police Department (PHXPD), using a combination of criteria developed by Zhang and von Dran (2000) and Cober et al. (2004). Inspired by the Herzberg (1959) workplace model of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as two separate dimensions of quality, Zhang and von Dran divided Web site design features into those that meet serviceability or "hygiene" requirements, the absence of which create user dissatisfaction (e.g., broken links), and "motivator" factors, such as valuable information and impressive graphics, which maintain user

interest and promote Web site exploration and repeat visitation. Cober and colleagues reviewed empirical and theoretical work in consumer behavior and human-computer interaction to propose a model of what makes a Web page effective, specifically as a recruiting tool. Among the variables they identified as significant were “usability,” “entertainment value,” and “coherent aesthetic.”

From these studies, three broad categories emerged as essential dimensions of recruiting–Web site quality: navigational ease, quality of information, and aesthetic value. Multiple components make up each of these dimensions. *Navigational ease* includes the functionality of the links, the speed with which pages load, the presence and functionality of a search tool, other navigational aids (such as site maps and links back to the top of the page), and the layout or organization of the Web page. The accuracy, relevance, completeness, and writing style all contribute to the overall *quality of information*; unity of design, contrast in design elements, and user engagement fall under the heading of *aesthetic value*.

Williams (2004) provided precise definitions of these aesthetic qualities. *Unity* as an aesthetic concept also has multiple components: *repetition* of visual elements (such as shapes, colors, and textures), *alignment* of design elements such that they have a visual connection to each other (as opposed to appearing arbitrarily placed), and *proximity* of items that relate to one another in terms of content. *Contrast* means the degree to which distinct design elements actually look distinct. With regard to the use of color, for example, red and blue create more contrast than red and orange. Finally, *user engagement* can be summed up colloquially as “bells and whistles” that make a Web page more entertaining (e.g., video, sound effects, animation).

The same evaluator rated all four Web sites. Each site was rated “poor,” “fair,” or “good” for each of the three broad qualities as well as for their components. Some of the criteria can be objectively measured, such as the existence of broken links or the accuracy of information. Other criteria, such as unity, can be more subjective, but the evaluator established the rating based on the less subjective components (repetition, alignment, and proximity). Nevertheless, these ratings should be viewed as subjective.

## Results

Ratings of the area law-enforcement Web pages are displayed in Table 4.1. The rationale behind each rating is provided in the discussion that follows.

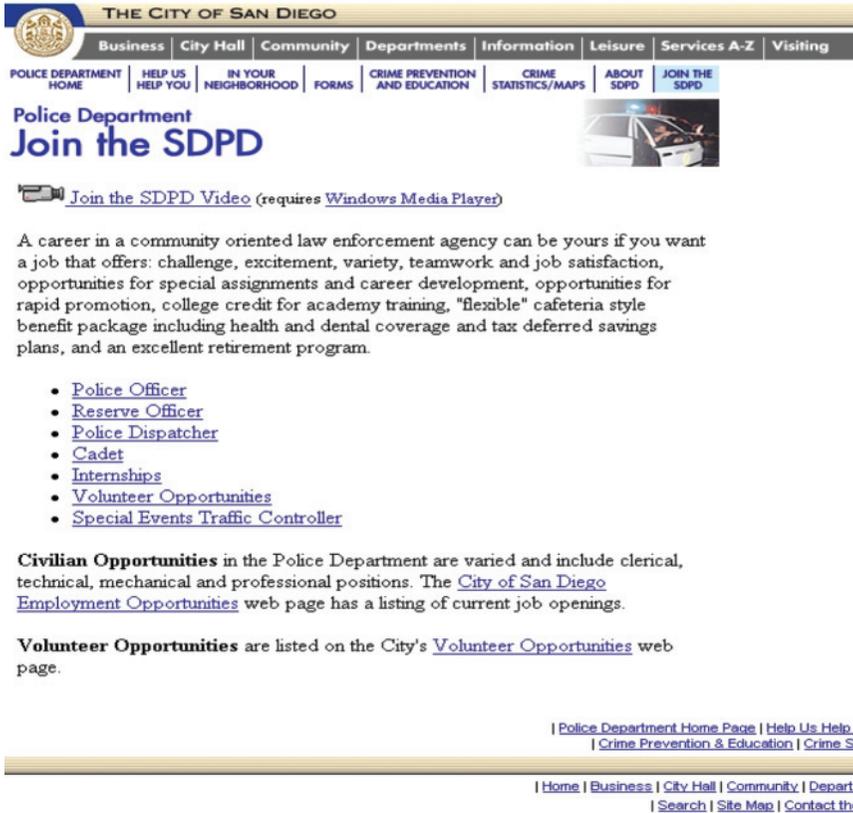
### Navigational Ease

The first item encountered on the SDPD recruiting home page, shown in Figure 4.1, is the recruiting video, whose very placement confers upon it great importance; over the course of the evaluation period, it did not usually work, nor did a second video on the physical-ability test (PAT). Even when they did function, the moving images degenerated

**Table 4.1**  
Evaluation of Recruiting Web Pages

Characteristic	SDPD	LVMPD	LAPD	PHXPD
Navigational ease	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor
Search tool	Good	Poor	Poor	Fair
Other navigational aids	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor
Functionality of links	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Speed of pages loading	Fair	Fair	Good	Poor
Content organization	Poor	Fair	Good	Poor
Quality of information	Fair	Fair	Good	Poor
Accuracy	Fair	Good	Good	Poor
Relevance	Fair	Fair	Good	Poor
Completeness	Good	Fair	Good	Fair
Writing style	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Aesthetic value	Poor	Fair	Good	Poor
Unity	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Contrast	Poor	Good	Good	Poor
User engagement	Poor	Fair	Good	Poor

Figure 4.1  
San Diego Police Department Main Recruiting Web Page



RAND MG724-4.1

into a series of stills. Possibly, there was an issue with the server, as a link to a one-page document of an advertisement for testing in Minnesota took a long time to load—more than 10 seconds. Regardless of the root cause, these problematic links were among the most conspicuous flaws on any of the recruiting Web pages visited and need improvement. The search tool on the SDPD recruiting Web page seems to work quite well, though it is somewhat less precise than it might be: It retrieves results for the entire City of San Diego rather than for SDPD alone. The same is true for the site map.

The SDPD (Figure 4.1) and PHXPD recruiting Web pages are subsidiaries of their respective city-government Web pages, but this is not the case for LVMPD (Figure 4.2) and LAPD (Figure 4.3); the former is actually part of the Clark County government site. A

**Figure 4.2**  
Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Main Recruiting Web Page

**JOIN THE FORCE** • **THE ACADEMY** • **OUT-OF-TOWN APPLICANTS** • **SEMINARS & EVENTS** • **MESSAGE BOARD** • **CONTACT**

**WELCOME.**

If you're here, it's because you believe you have what it takes to stand up for a community and keep it safe. And if that's the case, you're exactly who the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department is looking for. We encourage you to find the areas for which you're qualified. When you're ready, we will test to find the perfect fit. But it won't be a walk in the park. Protecting our town requires a strong commitment to our hiring standards. Then again, so does the dedication you'll need to keep this city safe.

**PROTECT THE CITY.  
JOIN THE FORCE.**

POLICE OFFICER	CORRECTIONS OFFICER	SEMINARS & EVENTS
<p><b>Police Recruit</b> Annual Salary Range \$47,403 - \$67,496 After Probation, Annual Salary Range \$54,350 - \$77,376 <a href="#">Before applying, READ this...</a></p> <p> <b>FOR THE MAR 11<sup>th</sup> TEST APPLY HERE</b></p> <p><b>Police Recruit testing in California</b> Annual Salary Range \$47,403 - \$67,496 After Probation, Annual Salary Range \$54,350 - \$77,376 <a href="#">Before applying, READ this...</a></p> <p> <b>FOR THE FEB 9<sup>th</sup> TEST APPLY HERE</b></p> <p><b>Police Cadet</b> Starting Annual Salary \$32,386 <a href="#">Before applying, READ this...</a></p> <p> <b>FOR THE MAR 17<sup>th</sup> TEST APPLY HERE</b></p> <p><b>Meet YOUR Recruiter</b> <a href="#">Get more information...</a></p>	<p><b>Corrections Recruit</b> Annual Salary Range \$47,403 - \$67,496 After Probation, Annual Salary Range \$54,350 - \$77,376 <a href="#">Before applying, READ this...</a></p> <p> <b>FOR THE FEB 26<sup>th</sup> TEST APPLY HERE</b></p> <p><b>Meet YOUR Recruiter</b> <a href="#">Get more information...</a></p>	<p><b>PREP SEMINARS (Police Readiness &amp; Education Program)</b> To assist Police Recruits attain their goal of becoming a Police Officer with LVMPD <a href="#">Get more information...</a></p> <p><b>Recruitment Events</b> <a href="#">Get more information...</a></p>

[Join the Force](#) | [The Academy](#) | [Out-of-Town Applicants](#) | [Seminars & Events](#) | [Message Board](#) | [Contact](#)  
© 2006-2007 Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department [recruitment@lvmpd.com](mailto:recruitment@lvmpd.com)

SOURCE: Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. Used with permission.  
RAND MG724-4.2

Figure 4.3  
Los Angeles Police Department Main Recruiting Web Page

**LAPD ONLINE**

**EXPEDITED TESTING**

**POLICE OFFICER RECRUITMENT INCENTIVE PROGRAM (PORIP)**

**NOW PLAYING**

The LAPD trailer, featuring the men and women of the LAPD, can now be seen on the big screen.

- Episode 1 - [Click Here](#)
- Episode 2 - [Click Here](#)
- Episode 3 - [Click Here](#)
- Mayor Villaraigosa - [Click Here](#)
- Chief Bratton - [Click Here](#)
- Asst. Chief Paysinger - [Click Here](#)
- Officer Julie Browne - [Click Here](#)
- Officer Ryan White - [Click Here](#)

Are you a high school student, college student, member of the military, school guidance counselor or parent of a recruit with more questions about the LAPD? Find out those answers here.

I Am A.

**E-NEWSLETTER SIGNUP**

Sign up today to receive our email newsletter for the latest information on LAPD recruitment events and activities.

**CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS**

For a list of Test Locations & Upcoming Events click [here](#).

**ORIENTATION/ORAL PREP SEMINAR**

Meetings will take place every 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month\* at the Personnel Department Civil Service Commission Room (Rm 350 3rd floor).

700 E. Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
6:00 - 7:30 pm

**DOWNLOADS**

[WALLPAPERS](#) [SCREENSAVERS](#) [E-POSTCARDS](#)

\*The City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Police Department does not discriminate in hiring based on race, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status or domestic partner status.

Want more information? Contact an LAPD recruiter:  
866-444-LAPD (866-444-5273) or [joinlapd@lapd.lacity.org](mailto:joinlapd@lapd.lacity.org)

JoinLAPD.com - © Copyright 2004, City of Los Angeles Personnel Department, The Los Angeles Police Department. All rights reserved.

SOURCE: Los Angeles Police Department. Used with permission.  
RAND MG724-4.3

police department's perceived stature is diminished by being relegated to just one of many components of a municipal government Web site. To illustrate the point, note the prominence of the department insignia on the LVMPD and LAPD recruiting Web pages as compared to the recruiting Web page for SDPD, which displays the city seal *in lieu* of the badge. In addition, having recruiting links bracketed by general government links clutters the site and complicates navigation.

The layout of the SDPD recruiting Web page is confusing. If the intended purpose of the SDPD recruiting Web page is to attract prospective officers, as the recruiting situation suggests that it should be, the Web-page content should be geared solely toward that purpose. Instead, internships and civilian employment opportunities in the department are given nearly equal billing. So long as this other information retains high salience, it should be more sensibly incorporated. For example, "Police Dispatcher," "Special Events Traffic Coordinator," and "Volunteer Opportunities" should all fall under the heading of "Civilian Opportunities at SDPD." This grouping is more logical than having "Civilian Opportunities" as a separate heading and directing users to "City of San Diego Employment Opportunities," where they have to start searching all over again for job opportunities within SDPD. Similarly, two links read "Volunteer Opportunities" (one of which is also under another heading "Volunteer Opportunities," compounding the redundancy). Both are linked to the same place, but their proximity leads the user to believe otherwise.

The FAQs on the SDPD Web site are conveniently linked to answers down the same page to drastically reduce scrolling. Unfortunately, the user has to navigate away from the main page to find a link to the FAQs. This is also true of links to recruiters, recruiting seminars, and testing dates.

LVMPD's recruiting Web site is diluted to some degree by having some of the same information presented in a blander format on its primary Web site. While the home page of the primary LVMPD Web site does have a prominent link to the intended recruiting page, the link was overlooked initially because it invites users to "click here to learn more about careers in law enforcement" without specifying the agency. When "Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department" was entered as a

search term in either the Yahoo!® or Google™ search engine, the relatively lackluster “Employment” Web page was listed before the true recruiting Web site. LVMPD’s true recruiting Web site was several pages down on the search-result lists when the word “metropolitan” was omitted and the word “employment” was added, as they likely would be by job seekers. SDPD should take heed and ensure that a revised recruiting Web page supplants, rather than supplements, the existing one.

In addition to problems with navigating *to* the recruiting Web site, LVMPD can improve the navigability *within* the Web site. There is no search tool, site map, or FAQs. The recruiting Web site does feature a message board of posted questions instead of an FAQ section. Although laudable for the access and interaction it affords users, a message board has risks. It is potentially maintenance-intensive and allows users to dictate the quality of the questions, which varies considerably as a result. While it is not inherently true of message boards, answers to specific questions on LVMPD’s message board can be difficult to find. An additional concern is that the user names of some participants do not necessarily portray the department’s culture in the best possible light (e.g., gunshark, Sweep the Leg).

Links to a document about the corrections recruit position at LVMPD were broken, preventing would-be applicants from accessing information the Web page instructs them to read before applying. With recruitment shortfalls a critical issue for law-enforcement agencies nationwide, such errors on a recruiting Web page need to be avoided, and free, simple, automated tools are available to check for such broken links. Other links are functional and load with reasonable speed, though it is worth noting that loading speed would, in some cases, be enhanced if users were not routed back to the aforementioned employment page of the main LVMPD Web site.

In its favor, the LVMPD site sensibly posts salary and test-date information on the main recruiting page, along with multiple links to recruiter contact information. As stated, the Web site is independent of the Clark County government Web site—the options lead only to information about LVMPD. This makes the content organization

cleaner and easier to comprehend than SDPD's, in spite of the absence of the search tool and the site map.

The LAPD recruiting Web page did not have a search tool or a site map either, but, as on LVMPD's page, the page layout was unburdened by references to other government departments and hence greatly simplified. Options across the middle of the home page were so intuitive ("Career," "Rewards," "Join") that the lack of drop-down menus becomes less of an issue. Rather than having a standard section, LAPD's recruiting Web site attempts to tailor information for different audiences. Users can indicate, using a drop-down menu on the home page, that they are high-school students, college students, guidance counselors, members of the military, or parents. Ignoring for the moment the quality of the answers, these categories are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. The tool was thus less efficient and less useful than a well-organized, generic FAQ page, though this deficiency is again somewhat mitigated by the fact that the content of the Web site as a whole is quite well-organized.

Loading of pages on LAPD's recruiting Web site is virtually instantaneous with the exception of the videos, which are well worth the slight delays. SDPD should take note: LAPD practically guarantees that site visitors will be able to view the movies by providing options for three popular media software packages (Microsoft® Windows Media® Player, RealAudio®, and QuickTime®) and three options for movie size and resolution to accommodate differences in connection speed. One of several links to LAPD officer testimonials was broken. Despite the relatively small loss of information, a larger price is paid in terms of hygienic deficiency causing user dissatisfaction.

Navigating the PHXPD Web site was laborious. Like the SDPD recruiting Web page, it is but one part of a larger municipal-government Web site; the city's links ran across the top of the page, while the police department links were literally marginalized. Potential recruits were almost certain to click on the city "Employment" link before noticing the much smaller "Employment" link off to the left, which was still not dedicated exclusively to the police department. The PHXPD Web site suffered from poor content organization. Information relevant to employment with PHXPD was scattered about the main page, com-

peting with topics of interest to the general public. Links to “Employment FAQs” and “Hiring Process Orientation Class” were buried in a long list of items, beneath “Red Light Camera Enforcement Program FAQs” and “Alarm Permit Information,” among others. A large text box on the right side of the main page advertised an upcoming test in Toledo, Ohio, but there was no mention of local test dates; one had to navigate away from the main page and download an application to see those.

The employment FAQ page was also in disarray. A question about the number of officers the department is hiring was preceded by a question about the use of free weights for the bench press. In an attempt to expedite navigation, the page included links to each of the 15 FAQs in the right margin, but users would not encounter them until they had already scrolled through half of the list.

On the employment page, “{Message}” atop the right column was a telltale sign of missing information. In the center of the same page, directions for obtaining more information referred to a link no longer present. Elsewhere, visitors were informed that a page was no longer in use, but the link had not been removed.

The Web site had a two-step search tool that required users to select the search method (e.g., word, date) before entering the search terms. It was a serviceable tool, but the added complication slowed navigation and would be unnecessary were it not searching the entire city government site.

Lastly, pages on the PHXPD Web site materialized at a below-average rate. The recruiting video sometimes failed to load on the initial attempt and stalled or degenerated into a series of stills on other occasions.

### **Quality of Information**

The quality of the information on the SDPD site was uneven. The introductory paragraph did not grab the reader with a description of the inspiring careers that SDPD offers. It was also misleading, because it implied by juxtaposition that all of the benefits listed applied to interns and volunteers. The quality of information improved somewhat thereafter, but the Web site was sprinkled with minor typographical

and grammatical errors. When it was first visited, the SDPD recruiting Web page was not current with respect to the names and telephone numbers of the personnel in the recruiting unit, and, for some reason, the test dates for 2007 were still posted. SDPD needs its Web site to give users the impression that it is a squared-away organization, though—trivial they may seem—mistakes in the text and obsolete information defeat this purpose. Applicants we surveyed expressed skepticism about whether SDPD truly was hiring, and the opening of the Web site can dispel the uncertainty by indicating the number of new recruits added to the department's ranks each quarter.

The SDPD recruiting Web site had nothing comparable to LAPD's signing bonus, newly introduced and writ large on its recruiting Web site. LAPD advertised that, for a limited time, it would be offering up to \$10,000 to lateral recruits on completion of the probationary period. Perhaps this option is not within SDPD's budget, but, at minimum, the tone and emphasis of the lateral-transfer page need to be altered. Currently, the SDPD page dwells on the bureaucratic barriers laterals will have to surmount before they can be hired, without so much as a word of encouragement. Applications from laterals should not merely be "accepted"; laterals should be highly coveted or, at the very least, welcomed for their credentials and experience, and the text should be more explicit about their eligibility for a higher pay grade.

To SDPD's credit, the Web page was quite thorough in its provision of information about the application process, the academy, the specialized units, and crime in the city. When they worked, the videos did an admirable job of filling in the details on the application process from the written test through the academy. The site included impressive maps of the divisions, SDPD's meticulously kept crime statistics, and the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS). Although their relevance to recruitment is not immediately obvious, these features illustrate the size and sophistication of a major metropolitan police department.

Still, there is room for improvement in the completeness of the information available at the site. Details on benefits and promotional opportunities were cursory at best. Proffering the names and numbers of individual recruiters is an attractive feature, but this personal

touch could be enhanced by including photos of the recruiters, as the LVMPD recruiting Web page has done. Moreover, aside from the recruiting seminars, it would be wise to list the career fairs the SDPD recruiters plan to attend.

The SDPD Web site's description of the written test gives prospective recruits a good sense of what to expect, but a practice exam should be posted. SDPD has been advocating for a sample test, and the city is preparing these materials. A sample test cannot come soon enough. After all, recruits can practice the PAT, and, barring that, the PAT video shows every segment of the obstacle course and suggests techniques for its successful negotiation. Applicants should receive the same level of support for the written test.

The paragraphs "A Great Place to Live and Work" and "Women in the SDPD" present two opportunities to enhance recruitment by conveying information in a more compelling way. The department's sales pitch for life in the city of San Diego is restrained. It could stress the appeal of Southern California's mild climate, diverse landscape, and the quality of life. "Women in the SDPD" is a series of welcoming statements (e.g., women are "highly valued officers") but needs specifics to support them. Women visiting this page will have specific questions. What ranks have women attained at SDPD? Are there any women in the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit or other traditionally male-dominated specialized units? What do female officers have to say about working for SDPD?

In terms of content, the LVMPD recruiting Web site was basically adequate. The writing had a paramilitary flavor to it, in keeping with a paramilitary image the department apparently wishes to convey. This motif was taken to excess in the video theater, however. There, visitors could watch a series of six videos with such titles as "Discipline," "Sacrifice," and "Perseverance." With little narrative context and an overdose of drill-instructor hazing, these videos did not appear to be information resources for prospective recruits. The Web site allowed visitors to download a sample written test, a 90-day fitness-training plan, and even a copy of dispatch codes to prepare for the academy, but it did not give users a sense of what it is actually like to work for LVMPD. Apart from a couple of aerial views of the world-famous Vegas Strip in

the introductory portions of the videos, LVMPD almost seems to be avoiding an association with one of the country's most popular vacation destinations and one of its fastest growing cities.

Finding information about recruitment of lateral transfers at either the LVMPD recruiting Web page or its home page was too difficult. The issue was broached only in a message-board inquiry titled "transferring" [sic], to which a Web-site administrator had responded that LVMPD does not exempt laterals from the academy under any circumstances. This response seems intended to deter highly qualified candidates. Prospective applicants from outside Nevada can see the name and photo of the LVMPD recruiter assigned to their state, and the agency regularly administers tests in Southern California. LVMPD's innovation is prominently on display with its Household Inclusion Recruitment and Employment (HIRE) program, which provides information for out-of-town applicants and their families about vocational, educational, medical, and cultural resources in the Las Vegas area. HIRE is not just a page on LVMPD's recruiting Web site but, as an Internet locus, a reassuring reference for long-distance prospects.

From an information standpoint, the LAPD recruiting Web site earns mostly high marks. Important topics, such as benefits, salary, and advancement opportunities, received thorough yet usually concise treatments. Users could read testimonials from a diverse coalition of officers describing the personal rewards they have reaped from serving with LAPD. The testimonials covered many of the noblest motives people profess for wanting to become police officers.

These ideals also came across very strongly in the Web site's fictional episodic films, which emphasized positive interactions with the citizenry. Although the films were designed primarily to entertain and inspire, viewers do get an authentic portrayal of police procedure as officers grapple with realistic situations (a domestic-violence call, a foot pursuit, a child abduction, and a hostage crisis). The films' link to reality is greatly enhanced by casting actual LAPD officers. By shooting in a diversity of locations throughout the city on a typically sun-drenched day, the films conveyed simultaneously the challenges and the policing environment.

LAPD's Web site promoted several resources and incentive programs designed to increase the number and success rate of recruits. The aforementioned lateral-transfer signing bonus also exists for regular recruits, albeit at a lesser amount, through October 2008. To help reduce travel expenses, candidates from over 150 miles away may be eligible for expedited testing, wherein they move through the first four phases of the selection process during three consecutive days. All active and retired city employees (not just police officers), qualified nonprofit organizations, and neighborhood councils can participate in the Police Officer Recruitment Incentive Program (PORIP), which pays bounties of \$1,000 for each referred candidate who graduates from the academy. By clicking on enlarged text in the center of the home page, visitors could find a time and place to sit for the written test, administered almost every day at one or more locations throughout Southern California. LAPD's written test has an unorthodox essay format and therefore no study guide; however, writing tips, recommended writing classes, and access to LAPD mentors give proactive recruits every chance to succeed.

Not all of the information on LAPD's Web site was adequate. Aside from the films, the Web site made little attempt to promote Los Angeles as a desirable place to live and work. The generic recruiting email address and the main phone number were ubiquitous features of the Web site, but, whether by accident or design, the actual recruiters remained anonymous. Recruiters should introduce themselves to as many aspiring public-safety employees as possible and use the Internet toward that end. The text referred to nine steps in the selection process, but only eight were listed. It bears repeating that the tailored information pages are an inferior substitute for an FAQ section, and parts of the Web site would benefit from some editing.

Much of the information relevant to prospective recruits was available on the PHXPD Web site, but users may not have the tenacity to find it. Recruiting information was commingled with unrelated city and police information, as already mentioned. A section on the application process stated that there was no study guide for the written test. On a separate page, however, a response to an FAQ on the content of the written test included links to an exam-preparation guide and a

sample test. The telephone number of the recruiting office was located only on the “Out of State Peace Officer Lateral Transfer” page. Users also had to sift through redundancy. The “How Do I Get Started?” and “Processing Procedures” pages covered the same topics and in the same order. One of the pages should be eliminated or change to focus on material appropriate to that page and link to the rest. Sections on out-of-state applicants and police recruit ride-alongs were rudimentary enough to be absorbed into the FAQ page. Given the slight differences between the in-state and out-of-state lateral-transfer pages, they could easily be consolidated. Although these issues might seem more germane to the previous section on navigational ease, in this case, misinformation, duplicated information, and hidden information were the root causes of navigational difficulties.

For all its deficiencies, the PHXPD Web site wisely included a page dedicated to female officers. In their own words, female officers described how they are accepted, successful, and content members of the department. The collection of testimonials demonstrated the possibilities for women within the organization, rather than dealing in abstractions, as SDPD's Web site does. Finally, Phoenix amenities were touted in a way that is slightly better than SDPD's pitch for San Diego. PHXPD's Web site referred to specific attractions in the city (e.g., booming economy, resorts, professional sports franchises), whereas San Diego was cast too much as a city that is in *proximity* to attractions.

### **Aesthetic Value**

Aesthetically, the SDPD recruiting Web site had a dated, amateur quality to it. A huge void of white space occupied the right-hand side of the page, possibly because the pages were constructed for a narrower screen than the standard. The area could be used for any number of things, such as a slide show or some other eye-catching display. The only two photographs of police officers on the SDPD recruiting page were tiny, washed out, grainy, and archival in appearance.

Apparently, the photo in the upper-right-hand corner was meant to serve as a contrast tool to differentiate the “Join the SDPD” Web pages from “Crime Statistics/Maps” and other pages. New, larger, high-resolution photos would better serve this purpose. Otherwise, links

were blue on the SDPD recruiting Web page, and regular text was black, with headings in bold, all on a white background. The second photograph, depicting two beach-patrol officers greeting a man and a boy on the strand, was the lone graphic accompaniment to the short text extolling San Diego and its police department. With so few design elements incorporated in the page, unity and contrast were basically achieved solely from the standard text formatting, as in ordinary documents. The result was visually uninteresting.

When compared to the rest of the Web site, and when it works properly, the SDPD recruiting video was a good addition. “If the badge fits, wear it” is a clever slogan, and the less scintillating details of the application process were bookended by clips of officers in action that may entice viewers. However, several aspects of the video were disconnected from what SDPD applicants say are their motivation for applying. For example, scenes of SDPD officers marching in formation in full gear and the mounted division’s coordinated drawing and brandishing of their batons may actually dissuade applicants. Two noteworthy drawbacks in the video were the significant deterioration in sound quality during the interview with the background investigator and segments that were not stimulating, particularly when motion footage transitioned to a series of still images that were often out of sync with the commentary.

On the LVMPD recruiting page, a panning animation of stylized imagery underscored the mandate to “Protect the city. Join the Force.” The illustrations and the block lettering were blatant references to comic-book superheroes. It is an ingenious marketing strategy. This theme was not always sustained on the site’s other pages. The same drawing of a chiseled police officer was used throughout the site, unifying the pages at the expense of contrast and, perhaps, of inclusiveness. A banner atop each page replicating the drop-down menu was clearly meant to distinguish the pages from each other and ran right across the brim of the officer’s hat, marring the pages’ appearance. Despite ample margins on either side of the text, the Web site was only sparsely populated with small photographs. Through the use of varied fonts, spatial separation, and color contrasts, the site’s links and ordinary text were usually well differentiated.

LAPD's recruiting Web site was outfitted with an array of bells and whistles. The site opened with a view of the downtown Los Angeles skyline blending into an attractive, marbled blue background, accompanied by an intense burst of percussive music, an updated "Dragnet" theme of sorts. Halfway down the page, users were invited to download screensavers and wallpaper of stills from the videos and send e-postcards of LAPD officers. More than just fancy gimmicks, these accessories serve as recruiting tools by encouraging visitors to share their interest in LAPD with friends, potentially attracting more people to the site in the process.

Aesthetic unity and contrast were very competently achieved on the LAPD recruiting Web site. Formatting of the pages was remarkably consistent: The main topic was mustard-colored, uppercase letters on a royal-blue background with a short summary beneath, followed by logical subtopics in blue with details beneath. When the subtopics linked to further information, they were underlined, boxed, and accompanied by a photograph. Because the formatting was disciplined, there was greater contrast in deviation from the template. Sooner or later, everyone notices the bright yellow triangular beacon in the upper-left corner of every page, exhorting viewers to "Apply now! Click here." But the user's attention was drawn to the item all the more quickly because nothing else on the page was flashing, bright yellow, or triangular.

Three extremely polished films were the centerpiece of LAPD's recruiting Web site. Their sophisticated editing and effects, multiple camera angles, smooth narrator, and "cliffhanger" format made for compelling entertainment. Such high production value does not come cheaply, of course. LAPD having, no doubt, invested lavishly in the films, the Web site seemed just slightly prideful about them, though not to the degree that they overshadowed its larger purpose.

The end result of PHXPD's recruiting Web site was a page that closely resembles SDPD's Web page, so it need not be discussed at length. The lone visual element worth emulating was a large graphic of the department badge, a novel insignia stylishly incorporating the mythical bird for which the city is named. Apart from that, its photos were too few and too small, and the font was minuscule—all the more frustrating because the white space on several pages was enormous.

Important links, which ought to stand out to the user, were instead easily overlooked, making site exploration a more time-consuming and eye-straining experience.

## Summary

More than 50 percent of SDPD applicants report using the Internet to find information about becoming an SDPD officer. Clearly, the Internet can be a valuable resource for simply sharing information (e.g., the next test date), setting the record straight (e.g., SDPD is truly hiring and the salaries are comparable to those of San Diego–area college graduates), and showcasing the attractiveness of an SDPD career. SDPD’s peer police departments—those competing with SDPD for recruits—are creating Web sites exclusive to the recruiting task and, in doing so, making effective use of the Internet. Introducing viral elements, as LAPD has with its e-postcards, offers a potential avenue for SDPD to break into new recruiting pools. The site need not be a spectacular multimedia experience, but it should at least reflect the professionalism of SDPD itself. The mediocrity of some of the recruiting Web sites we evaluated suggests that a professional Web site can give SDPD a competitive advantage. Our analysis of SDPD’s current Web site found the quality of information and ease of use to be fair, but the aesthetic value was generally poor. Immediate improvements to the quality of information could be made by providing SDPD Recruiting staff with substantial control over content so that they may produce a professionally designed site, regularly update test dates, and market SDPD careers to prospective applicants.

## Targeting Recruitment Activities Outside the San Diego Area

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### Introduction

Chapter Four evaluated SDPD's use of the Internet as one of its current recruitment instruments. This chapter focuses on the recruiting efforts outside the San Diego area and their potential benefits for SDPD. SDPD has experimented with recruiting outside the San Diego area and has incorporated an expansion of these efforts into its recruiting strategy. To assess the viability of this strategy, we conducted a review of the research literature on interstate moves and examined recent statistical trends in extralocal migration—intercounty, interstate, and inter-regional moves. We also developed two measures of police pay relative to (1) the earnings of a labor-force segment whose demographic characteristics overlap (hypothetically) with the pool of likely police recruits and (2) the cost of living in a metropolitan area. The first measure is used to assess the financial attractiveness of SDPD employment compared to employment with police departments of other large metropolitan cities; the second is used to compare the affordability of such areas for starting police officers. Lastly, we developed methods for scoring criminal-justice programs as potential targeted-recruiting sites based on the number of graduates relative to the number of police jobs.

### Infrequency of Extralocal Migration

On the whole, extralocal migration occurs relatively infrequently among people in the rough age demographic of SDPD applicants. As

seen in Table 5.1, almost 30 percent of persons 20 to 29 years old<sup>1</sup> changed residences between 2004 and 2005. Of these, almost 61 percent moved within their current county of residence. In all, about 11 percent of this age group moved from outside their county, and only about 5 percent moved from outside their state.

While individuals in this age demographic are generally unlikely to move long distances, the research literature on mobility indicates some demographic variability that may be advantageous to police-recruitment efforts. Huffman and Feridhanusetyawan (2007) reported that, on average, the likelihood of moving increases with each year of age until age 42; after that, the likelihood decreases. Of particular interest for SDPD recruiting, white males—who made up 59 percent of test takers from outside California—show the greatest propensity for interstate migration (see Huffman and Feridhanusetyawan, 2007). Similarly, SeongWoo Lee and Curtis Roseman (1999) reported that white families in the mid- to late 1980s had a higher rate of interstate migration than black families did (whites made up 72 percent of

**Table 5.1**  
**Number and Percentage of Persons Aged 20 to 29 Who Changed Residence Between 2004 and 2005**

Movers	All Movers	Same County	Intercounty Movers		
			Same State	Different State, Same Region	Different Region
Number (thousands)	10,980	6,671	2,361	1,132	818
Percentage of all 20- to 29-year-olds	28	17	6	3	2
Percentage of all movers	100	61	22	10	7

SOURCE: U.S. Department of the Treasury Bureau of Statistics et al. (undated, Table 34).

NOTE: Excludes those living in military quarters and those who moved from abroad.

<sup>1</sup> About 70 percent of applicants who passed the written test were in this age range.

all written-test takers from outside California). While this might be advantageous for increasing the number of recruits, it might adversely affect diversity at SDPD. As might be expected, migration was much more likely in families that had migrated at least once before—a finding that supports recruiting among San Diego’s semitransient military community, whose voluntary service demonstrates prior willingness to relocate.

On the other hand, Elder, King, and Conger (1996) found that youths’ educational aspirations were positively associated with their attitudes toward mobility; that is, high schoolers with low educational aspirations were less likely to express a desire to leave home and settle in other parts of the country. These findings are corroborated by Seong-Woo Lee and Curtis Roseman (1999; there are higher rates of migration among families with more-educated parents) and Irwin, Tolbert, and Lyson (1999; counties with more college graduates have higher rates of emigration). Considering that police departments generally do not require that applicants possess postsecondary educational credentials, this may reduce the overall productivity of extralocal recruitment.

Geographic factors also play a role in individuals’ decisions about extralocal migration. A number of studies have examined how relative characteristics of origin and destination locations impact immigration and emigration. Generally, destinations tend to have higher expected wages (Hicks, 1963; Sandefur, 1985; Davies, Greenwood, and Li, 2001; Huffman and Feridhanusetyawan, 2007), and lower unemployment (Davies, Greenwood, and Li, 2001; Meyer, Matthews, and Sommers, 2001), taxes (Fox, Herzog, and Schlottman, 1989; S. Lee and Roseman, 1999), and crime rates (Cushing, 1993; Huffman and Feridhanusetyawan, 2007). There is also some evidence that, on average, destinations with fair weather (e.g., sunshine, mild temperatures) attract more migrants (Shelley and Koven, 1993; Mueser and Graves, 1995; S. Lee and Roseman, 1999).

A model that compares San Diego’s relative attractiveness based on these geographic characteristics is beyond the scope of this review. However, as seen in Table 5.2, between 2000 and 2006, the San Diego metropolitan region generally lost more residents to emigration than it gained from immigration. Over this period, San Diego ranked 353

**Table 5.2**  
**Net Internal Migration, 2000–2006**

Metropolitan Area	Net Migration	Rank	Percentage of Population <sup>a</sup>
Areas with highest net influx			
Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario, Calif.	474,621	1	13.04
Phoenix–Mesa–Scottsdale, Ariz.	398,198	2	10.92
Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Marietta, Ga.	276,915	3	5.90
Las Vegas–Paradise, Nev.	259,537	4	16.46
Tampa–St. Petersburg–Clearwater, Fla.	242,033	5	9.50
Orlando–Kissimmee, Fla.	206,374	6	11.37
Dallas–Fort Worth–Arlington, Tex.	168,481	7	3.02
Houston–Sugar Land–Baytown, Tex.	146,090	8	2.85
Areas with highest net outflux			
Cleveland–Elyria–Mentor, Ohio	–93,100	352	–4.37
San Diego–Carlsbad–San Marcos, Calif.	–119,636	353	–4.16
Detroit–Warren–Livonia, Mich.	–192,032	354	–4.30
San Jose–Sunnyvale–Santa Clara, Calif.	–224,068	355	–12.72
Boston–Cambridge–Quincy, Mass.–N.H.	–265,184	356	–5.99
New Orleans–Metairie–Kenner, La.	–332,623	357	–28.41
San Francisco–Oakland–Fremont, Calif.	–349,672	358	–8.42
Chicago–Naperville–Joliet, Ill.–Ind.–Wisc.	–421,153	359	–4.53
Los Angeles–Long Beach–Santa Ana, Calif.	–937,685	360	–7.41
New York–Northern New Jersey–Long Island, N.Y.–N.J.–Pa.	–1,447,239	361	–7.79

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2008).

<sup>a</sup> At the midpoint of the 2000 and 2006 populations.

out of 361 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in net internal migration (the number of people who move in minus the number of those who move out of a metropolitan area within the United States, exclud-

ing immigrants and migrants from U.S. territories, such as Puerto Rico), losing 119,636 residents to other parts of the country (about 4.2 percent of its average population) who were not replaced by new residents.

These figures suggest that, for any number of reasons, perhaps including the high cost of housing, the relative attractiveness of San Diego is low or declining among the nonimmigrant population. This suggests that productive recruiting from outside the San Diego area may be challenging. This trend may be partly due to a drawdown of naval personnel during this period, so this trend may reverse in the coming years. SDPD can continue to monitor this trend to recalibrate its investments in nonlocal recruiting.

## **Financial Attractiveness of SDPD Nationally**

Given the findings from research on geographic characteristics, police pay represents one reasonable metric of regional attractiveness among this population. In this section, we use starting salary as a basic measure of financial attractiveness of SDPD as an organization relative to other urban police departments. Starting salary is an imperfect measure, as applicants also evaluate departments on future pay and their predictions of career trajectories. For example, while the New York City Police Department has one of the lowest starting salaries in the nation even before adjustments for cost of living, applicants may view a few years working on the streets of New York at a low pay as an investment in a more lucrative career elsewhere in the future, similar to an investment in several years of a college education. If the career trajectories, promotion opportunities, benefits, and pay scale vary widely across departments, the use of starting salary can be misleading. These factors are likely to be similar across the other major departments to which we compare SDPD, so they are less likely to be an issue in this analysis. That said, we present this analysis to aid SDPD in addressing questions about starting salary when recruiting nationally.

We collected advertised starting police-officer pay (nonrecruit) from the Web sites of the central city police departments within each

MSA. For example, we collected information on the Tucson Police Department's pay to represent police wages in the entire Tucson metropolitan area. Data were collected from multiple cities in areas with more than one central city, as indicated by its census designation (e.g., data were collected for both Los Angeles and Long Beach as the central cities in the Los Angeles–Long Beach metropolitan area). In all, we were able to obtain pay information from 271 cities. In many cases, a starting pay range was given, in which case we used the average of the minimum and maximum as our estimate. While these data are not as accurate as would be surveys of actual total compensation for new hires (including cash and noncash benefits, such as deferred retirement compensation, vacation pay, and health insurance), these are largely unavailable for a national sample of police departments. We feel that advertised starting pay, therefore, provides a reasonable estimate of how prospective applicants might *initially* assess the relative generosity of compensation across big-city police departments.

The raw variation in starting police pay may reflect regional differences both in the earning potential of specific worker qualifications and in costs of living. Thus the pay of a given police department is more or less attractive relative not only to that of other departments, but to nonpolice work for which a prospective applicant may otherwise be qualified. We therefore represent police pay for each central metropolitan city in two ways: (1) as a ratio to the median annual wages of a population of prospective applicants in the entire metropolitan area and (2) indexed to the local cost of living. Data on nonpolice earnings come from the 2005 wave of the ACS. As an approximation of the local population with the highest likelihood of seeking police work, this hypothetical population is limited to metropolitan-area employees who are white male citizens, 21 to 31 years old, with a high-school diploma but no bachelor degree. We do this not to suggest that SDPD target this group but rather to create a single benchmark group for which we can use census data to make wage comparisons. For wages to be roughly comparable to those of uniformed police officers, we further limit our population to persons who were full-time employees with no spells of unemployment in the prior year and who were not

members of the active-duty armed forces.<sup>2</sup> We obtained usable wage data for 309 metropolitan areas. In all, we compared police pay to median wages for 239 cities.

Cost-of-living data were available for a limited number of metropolitan areas from the U.S. Department of the Treasury Bureau of Statistics et al. (2006). The most current data available are for the fourth quarter of 2005. These data compare local prices for grocery items, housing, utilities, transportation, health care, and other miscellaneous goods and services to the national average. These price ratios are then weighted to create a weighted composite cost-of-living index (COLI) for each area (where 100 represents the national average). We adjust police pay to local costs of living by dividing advertised starting pay by the COLI score for a given metropolitan area and multiplying the result by 100. In this way, starting salaries can be compared in terms of their real purchasing power. As an example, consider two police departments, one in a metropolitan area with a COLI score of 100 (the national average), the other in a metropolitan area with a COLI score of 150 (50 percent more expensive than the national average). If they both have a starting pay of \$30,000, the COLI-adjusted pay of the first city's police department remains unchanged ( $\$30,000/100 \times 100 = \$30,000$ ), while the purchasing power of the second city's police department declines by one-third ( $\$30,000/150 \times 100 = \$20,000$ ).

Table 5.3 shows the ratio of starting salary for central-city police departments to metropolitan median wage for the 23 cities with the highest such wages (including San Diego), the remaining cities in California, and the adjoining states of Arizona, Oregon, and Nevada. Compared to what their nonpolice peers earn, the City of Redding (Calif.) Police Department is the best paying in the sample of cities. The starting salary for a Redding police officer is 2.18 times the median wage of white, male, non-college educated citizens between 20 and 31 years old who work full time in the Redding metropolitan area. The average ratio for all observed cities was 1.21 times nonpolice wages. By comparison, SDPD officers' starting pay is 23rd in the

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize that this strategy compares cities based on how well police are paid relative to comparably qualified nonpolice.

**Table 5.3**  
**Ratio of Police Starting Pay to Median Wages, by MSA Central City**

Reference-City Police Department	Ratio of Police- Department Starting Pay to Median Wages	Overall Rank (out of 240)	Rank Among Calif., Ariz., Oreg., and Nev. Only
Redding, Calif.	2.2	1	1
Chico, Calif.	2.2	2	2
Vallejo, Calif.	2.0	3	3
Santa Cruz, Calif.	2.0	4	4
Santa Rosa, Calif.	1.9	5	5
San Francisco, Calif.	1.8	6	6
Santa Ana, Calif.	1.8	7	7
Bellingham, Wash.	1.8	8	NA
Merced, Calif.	1.8	9	8
Salinas, Calif.	1.7	10	9
Visalia, Calif.	1.7	11	10
Olympia, Wash.	1.7	12	NA
Oakland, Calif.	1.7	13	11
Anaheim, Calif.	1.7	14	12
San Luis Obispo, Calif.	1.7	15	13
Sacramento, Calif.	1.7	16	14
Santa Barbara, Calif.	1.6	17	15
Gainesville, Fla.	1.6	18	NA
Ventura, Calif.	1.6	19	16
Fort Collins, Colo.	1.6	20	NA
Fayetteville, N.C.	1.6	21	NA
Tucson, Ariz.	1.5	22	17
San Diego, Calif.	1.5	23	18

**Table 5.3—Continued**

<b>Reference-City Police Department</b>	<b>Ratio of Police- Department Starting Pay to Median Wages</b>	<b>Overall Rank (out of 240)</b>	<b>Rank Among Calif., Ariz., Oreg., and Nev. Only</b>
Yuba City, Calif.	1.5	25	19
Riverside, Calif.	1.5	26	20
Eugene, Oreg.	1.5	27	21
San Bernardino, Calif.	1.5	28	22
Yuma, Ariz.	1.5	29	23
Stockton, Calif.	1.5	31	24
Flagstaff, Ariz.	1.5	32	25
Reno, Nev.	1.5	33	26
Salem, Oreg.	1.4	37	27
Los Angeles, Calif.	1.4	41	28
Bakersfield, Calif.	1.3	50	29
San Jose, Calif.	1.3	66	30
Modesto, Calif.	1.3	69	31
Phoenix, Ariz.	1.2	89	32
Las Vegas, Nev.	1.2	96	33
Portland, Oreg.	1.1	160	34

NOTE: The table lists the 23 cities with the highest median wages plus all census-defined MSAs in California, Arizona, Oregon, and Nevada. NA = not applicable.

nation, at 1.51 times median nonpolice wages. This suggests that a person with the demographic characteristics of the nonpolice comparison group would likely fare better financially (in terms of the wages he or she could command by virtue of education, age, and other factors) by taking a job with SDPD than by taking a job with any of 217 other police departments.

While starting pay for SDPD is generally comparable to nonpolice wages across the country, it is generally lower than starting pay at

other police departments in the region (SDPD and Buck Consultants, 2006). Overall, California police departments are relatively well paid compared to their civilian counterparts—all are in the top 30 percent of observed cities—as are police in the adjoining states (with the exception of Portland (Oreg.) Police Bureau officers, who rank in the lower 50 percent of observed cities). Among this group, the average central metropolitan police department pays its starting officers 60 percent more than the median wages of a comparable segment of the nonpolice labor force. Statistically, SDPD falls directly into the middle of these cities (50 percent of cities have a ratio of at least 1.5). Thus prospective police officers in the southwestern regional area (or those who are inclined to relocate to that area) have a number of financially attractive (as measured by starting salary) alternatives to San Diego.

Table 5.4 ranks selected central metropolitan cities by their COLI-adjusted starting police pay. While SDPD starting pay is comparatively lucrative in terms of what prospective recruits would likely earn in non-police employment, the area's high cost of living dilutes much of its purchasing power. Out of 116 metropolitan areas for which COLI data and police pay were available, San Diego's COLI-adjusted police pay (\$34,052) ranked 91. This placed it last out of the 14 central metropolitan cities observed in California, Arizona, Oregon, and Nevada. Given its COLI score (150.3), SDPD starting pay would have to increase to \$58,750 to achieve the average COLI-adjusted pay for all 116 observed central metropolitan cities; to obtain COLI-adjusted parity with San Bernardino and Riverside, SDPD would have to increase its starting police pay to \$65,963 and \$66,245, respectively.

## **Targeted Recruiting in Criminal-Justice Programs**

In Chapter Two, we noted that several departments are actively recruiting in other parts of the country, but there has been no reporting as to whether such efforts are successful. Part of the challenge of non-local recruiting is the difficulty and expense of spreading the message that recruiters will be in town and attracting candidates to a convenient testing site. SDPD asked us to evaluate targeted opportunities at

**Table 5.4**  
**Ratio of Police Starting Pay to Median Wages, by MSA Central City**

Reference-City Police Department	Starting Pay (\$)	COLI <sup>a</sup>	COLI- Adjusted Pay (\$)	Overall Rank (out of 116)	Rank Among Calif., Ariz., Oreg., and Nev. Only
San Francisco, Calif.	80,912	171.4	47,207	11	1
Oakland, Calif.	69,162	147.5	46,889	14	2
Tucson, Ariz.	45,510	97.4	46,725	15	3
Phoenix, Ariz.	45,094	101.8	44,297	27	4
Santa Ana, Calif.	69,036	156.1	44,225	29	5
Riverside, Calif.	56,460	128.1	44,075	31	6
San Bernardino, Calif.	56,220	128.1	43,888	33	7
Reno, Nev.	47,282	112.1	42,178	41	8
Las Vegas, Nev.	46,035	109.9	41,888	42	9
Anaheim, Calif.	63,825	156.1	40,887	51	10
San Jose, Calif.	62,726	158.1	39,675	59	11
Portland, Oreg.	40,980	115.5	35,481	80	12
Los Angeles, Calif.	54,475	159.0	34,261	90	13
San Diego, Calif.	51,180	150.3	34,052	91	14

<sup>a</sup> Source: U.S. Department of the Treasury Bureau of Statistics et al. (2006, Table 709).

criminal-justice programs nationally. Such targeted opportunities may offer a more easily reached pool of candidates with declared interest in law enforcement, an increased likelihood of passing the written exam, and a greater propensity to relocate to San Diego.

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) includes features from all colleges and universities in the United States and its territories, including basic institution features and enrollments in each degree program. We selected only those degree programs in corrections, corrections administration, criminal justice, law-enforcement administration, criminalistics and criminal science, police science,

security-services administration, and criminology.<sup>3</sup> This yielded 303 programs offering degrees at the bachelor's level. The largest such program is at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. Between July 2005 and June 2006, this program conferred 672 bachelor's degrees. In addition to being a prestigious program, there are a substantial number of recruit candidates, perhaps suggesting that this program would be an ideal recruiting ground.

The prospect of recruiting at John Jay is likely offset by the large number of law-enforcement opportunities in the New York area. A better measure of recruiting potential is the number of program graduates relative to the number of law-enforcement job opportunities in the area. Data on job openings are difficult to compile; however, the National Public Safety Information Bureau maintains an annually updated database on all police departments in the United States, including the number of sworn officers. This measures the number of currently occupied job slots and may be a useful proxy for potential local law-enforcement employment opportunities. Within 50 miles of John Jay College, there are nearly 60,000 active police officers. Therefore, annually, there are 89 officers for every graduate of John Jay's criminal-justice program, suggesting that there may be plenty of local opportunities with which SDPD would have to compete in order to attract a candidate to San Diego.

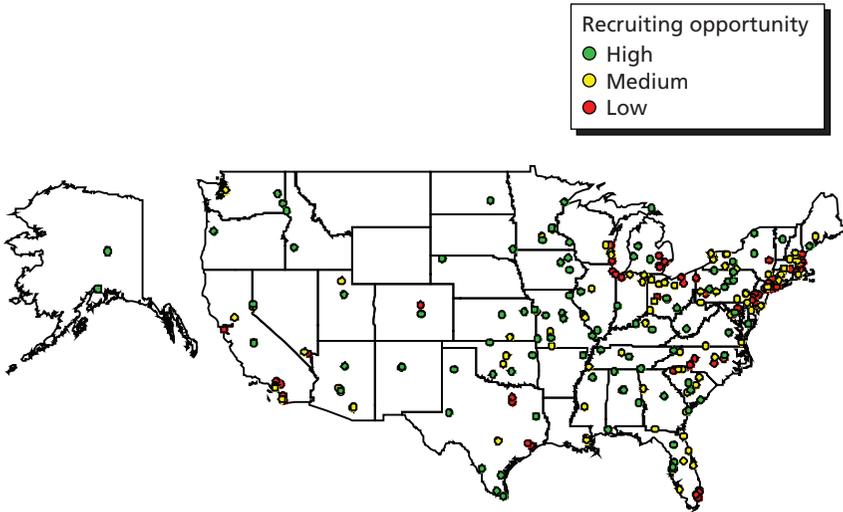
The selected recruiting target sites will need to balance several issues, including the total number of potential eligible candidates, the relative lack of local policing work, and the likelihood of attracting them to San Diego. For nonlocal recruiting to be most effective, we suggest that SDPD rank programs by the ratio of the number of graduates to the number of police officers in the surrounding area. Figure 5.1 shows a map of criminal-justice programs awarding bachelor's degrees, color-coded according to the graduate-to-officer ratio.

Our intention is that this be used as a guide to screen for good potential recruiting sites with no expectation that all programs highly ranked according to this metric will be ideal. For example, the

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<sup>3</sup> We selected programs with Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code 43.0102, 43.0103, 43.0107, 43.0109, 43.0110, 43.0111, 43.0112, 43.0113, 43.0199, or 45.0401.

**Figure 5.1**  
**Criminal-Justice Programs and Local Law-Enforcement Job Markets**



NOTE: A degree program is coded high (green), medium (yellow), or low (red) based on whether its graduate-to-officer ratio is in the top third, middle third, or bottom third, respectively, of those of all such programs. Data on police officers in Hawaii were not available.

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ranking flags Lake Superior State University in Michigan, a criminal-justice program with 61 graduates in 2006, as having the fewest police officers (40) within 50 miles. However, this ranking can be explained partly by the fact that it lies on the international border with Canada, so the territory within a 50-mile radius is largely Canadian. In addition, the program graduates a substantial number of Canadians who would be ineligible for SDPD due to citizenship issues. Programs further down the list are likely to be more suitable. We delivered a spreadsheet tool to allow SDPD to sort and search criminal-justice programs for their recruiters to identify, evaluate, and contact prospective sites.

This strategy is intended to flag potential recruiting opportunities. It does not account for the fact that, in some regions of the country, police job openings are extremely limited, even though there are many police officers (e.g., Denver, with an unexpected excess of sworn officers; see Chacon, 2007). The IPEDS data also do not identify or

separate criminal-justice programs that are within more general areas of study, such as sociology (e.g., Winona State University in Minnesota) or public administration (e.g., University of Michigan–Flint).

## Summary

This chapter notes that nonlocal recruiting can be a formidable challenge. First, it can be expensive to ship recruiters and city testing personnel out of the San Diego area. Second, effectively marketing SDPD and advertising test dates are difficult without sizable media buys. Third, research on extralocal migration suggests that relocating to another state is quite uncommon. Fourth, San Diego is experiencing a net outward migration and is increasing in population only due to births exceeding deaths. Lastly, the area's high cost of living dilutes much of a new SDPD officer's purchasing power.

SDPD, though, has several features that may act to counter those barriers. SDPD starting salaries are comparable to other major departments nationally when measured against local nonpolice wages. While SDPD starting pay is lower than many other California departments based on this measure, a person would likely fare better financially by taking a job with SDPD than by taking a job with any of 217 other police departments. San Diego is widely known as having an ideal climate and offers relatively safe urban living, and SDPD has maintained community relations that many U.S. urban centers should envy.

While this assessment notes that general nonlocal recruiting will be challenging, this in no way should dissuade SDPD from taking advantage of inside information and calculated opportunities when they present themselves. Graduates of criminal-justice programs are ideal targets of SDPD's recruiting. They have already self-selected to a law-enforcement career, they have college-level education, and they are likely to be at a point in their careers at which an out-of-state move would be conceivable. We recommend that SDPD sort criminal-justice programs by the number of graduates relative to the number of local law-enforcement jobs to flag those programs that are most likely to

produce interested candidates. Such nonlocal recruiting can be a useful supplement to the San Diego–area recruiting drive.



## Recruiter Management

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Among the key factors influencing the number of SDPD recruits, effective use of recruiters can be among the most important factors. First of all, SDPD has direct control over how it manages recruiters. More importantly, studies have shown that an organization like SDPD can increase the number of recruits by effectively managing its recruiters at little or no additional cost.

The current recruiting team has done well with an informal system in which managers qualitatively evaluate recruiters for their contribution to the team. The sergeant meets daily with recruiters and reviews their daily journals. Recruiters are assigned to specific areas: colleges, local schools, military bases, and out-of-state recruiting. Management ensures that all recruiters are assigned to a similar mix of areas. While the current team has proven effective in facing SDPD's recruiting challenges, we find that the informal system unduly depends on qualitative judgments of managers. With this chapter, we aim to assist the department in creating a formal system that manages recruiters with objective measures.

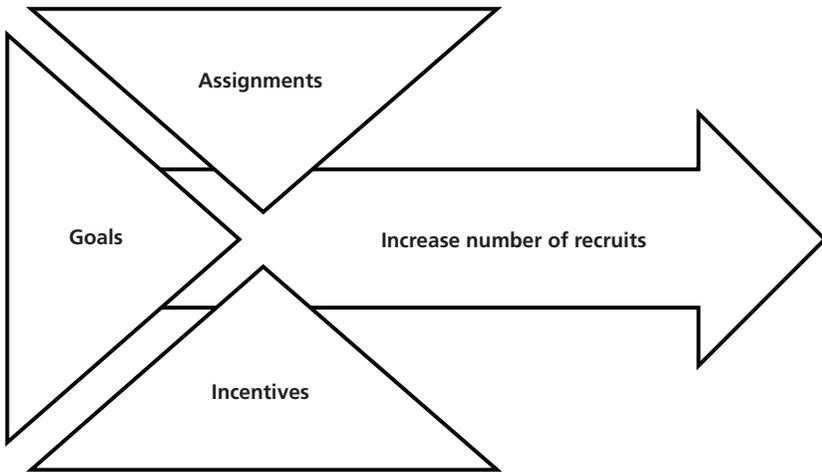
Designing an effective recruiter-management system involves a careful calibration of incentives and policy objectives through a series of experiments. This particular task is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, we will explore issues related to the recruiter-management system for SDPD based on studies from military-manpower studies, such as Oken and Asch (1997), Luby (1999), and Dertouzos and Garber (2006). Police recruiting is different from military recruiting in many ways. For instance, the U.S. military's recruiting system is one of

the largest recruiting operations in the world and is funded by the U.S. government. Police recruiting, on the other hand, is a local operation with limited funding. Military recruiters generally target a younger population than police recruiters do. Moreover, military members regard recruiting assignments as one of the more difficult assignments, while police officers generally view recruiting duties as more attractive than other duties. Despite these differences, we contend that the department can learn from the military-recruiting system in developing a formal system of recruiter management.

### Elements of a Recruiter-Management System

We can sort elements of a recruiter-management system into three main factors: goals, assignments, and incentives (see Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1**  
Elements of a Recruiter-Management System



### **Recruiting Goals Should Drive Recruiters' Behaviors**

Specific recruiting goals must reflect SDPD's policy objectives based on the department's needs. For example, SDPD values recruits with prior police experience, college-educated individuals with strong moral and medical fitness, racial and ethnic minorities and women to increase the diversity of the workforce, and individuals with certain skills, such as the ability to speak additional languages. These policy objectives need to guide recruiting goals for individual recruiters and the recruiting team.

Studies have shown that work units—especially marketing or sales units—perform better if they are given a clear, challenging goal, compared to “do-your-best or no goals” (Tubbs, 1986, p. 474). However, performance increases as the difficulty of the goal rises to a point, beyond which the performance will decline as the difficulty continues to rise (Chowdhury, 1993). Therefore, a careful calibration is needed to ensure that the difficulty of the recruiting goals does not go beyond the threshold of diminishing performance.

In the context of military recruiting, similar recruiting goals are reflected in *points* associated with different types of recruits. For example, Army recruiters receive more bonus points for signing enlistment contracts with high-quality youth, those who score above the 50th percentile on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT). SDPD could similarly award points for recruits with desirable features, such as college degrees and prior law-enforcement experience. Recruiters as individuals or a team should earn points for achieving targets for the number of applicants showing up for the written test, passing the PAT, and entering the academy. Recruiters may have different goals from one another, depending on any specialized tasks they may have been assigned. For example, recruiters tasked with recruiting those separating from the military may be given higher targets than recruiters tasked with college-campus recruiting or recruiting from hard-to-reach ethnic communities.

### **Optimal Assignments Match Recruiters with Targeted Applicant Pools**

Recruiters' levels of productivity vary with the characteristics of targeted applicant pools. Studies have shown that certain characteristics of military recruiters are highly predictive of recruiter productivity (Dertouzos and Garber, 2006). For example, among Army recruiters, recruiters with experience in core Army missions, such as combat-related occupations, tend to be more productive than other recruiters. For SDPD, recruiters with investigative experience or other desirable career tracks may be particularly effective. In addition, quality of matches between recruiters and the applicant pool can have a significant impact on the number of recruits. For example, Dertouzos and Garber (2006) found that Army recruiters tend to excel when they are assigned to areas or communities that match their own educational, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. SDPD has fielded a diverse recruiting team; the department can likely reap these benefits as a result.

### **Recruiter Incentives Encourage Optimal Performance of Recruiters**

The final element of the recruiter-management system is performance incentives. Incentives need not be limited to monetary awards. Other types of recognitions, including plaques, citations, medals, recognition at annual events, personal recognition by department and city leadership, and enhanced career advancement, can be powerful options to entice recruiters. Regardless of the types of incentives SDPD may choose, the power of incentives rests on transparency of qualifications for rewards and objectivity of the performance measure used for qualifications. For example, Oken and Asch (1997) and Luby (1999) described in detail features of rules and regulations across all branches of the U.S. military. For Army recruiters, each receives 50 points for meeting his or her recruiting mission. And even if a recruiter fails to meet an individual mission, he or she can still receive points if that unit meets its team mission. When recruiters exceed their mission, they receive additional points for overproduction. "Accrual of specified numbers of points over the course of specified numbers of months leads to command-level awards such as stars, badges, and rings" (Dertouzos and Garber, 2006, p. 8). SDPD could offer similar awards.

Having both individual-recruiter incentives and recruiting-team incentives, recruiters are urged to develop creative strategies on their own (e.g., local college outreach) but still contribute to efforts that require the team (e.g., staying on top of emails to the general recruiting team).

## Summary

In military-recruiting research, the effective use of recruiters has been shown to be more cost-effective than some recruit-centric programs, such as signing bonuses. Furthermore, a system of clear goals, strategic assignments, and well-crafted incentives can maximize recruiter productivity.

The system's effectiveness in increasing recruiters' effort, however, depends on how SDPD leaders manage recruiters. In their groundbreaking research on motivation and work, Vroom and Deci (1970) emphasized the importance of the management approach. For instance, they rejected two alternative management approaches. They argued that neither a management approach that detaches rewards from performance—based on an assumption that each employee should be rewarded based simply on being a member of a team—nor an approach that concentrates solely on external control by emphasizing extrinsic incentives can induce optimal effort from employees. They proposed a management approach that combines both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives. In this *participative management approach*, “the individual is given broad goals or objectives and is enabled to determine for himself how they are to be achieved. [Employees] become ego-involved with their jobs, emotionally committed to doing them well” (Luby, 1999, p. 13). In short, SDPD should set clear individual and team recruiting goals and monitor recruiters' performance, but it should give recruiters latitude in determining recruiting strategies.



## Overview of SDPD's Application Process

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### Introduction

Previous chapters identified and evaluated promising strategies in police recruitment and hiring. This chapter analyzes SDPD's application process that starts with taking a written exam and hopefully ends with entry into the academy.

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the application process. The remainder of the chapter provides analysis of the flow of applicants through this process using SDPD's system for tracking recruits. We note how various decision points in the process affect the total number and diversity of the candidates. Note that we make no attempt to second-guess any of the decisions made by background investigators, polygraph examiners, or medical and psychological examiners in this chapter. The primary goal is to flag stages that result in the loss of candidates and to suggest possible strategies for minimizing the risk of losing qualified and desirable candidates.

### Application Process

Applicants for the police-recruit position at SDPD go through several stages between taking the written exam and entry into the police academy. (We discuss the written test in more detail in Chapter Eight). Chapter Two detailed various strategies for attracting candidates to apply for the test. This chapter examines the process between the writ-

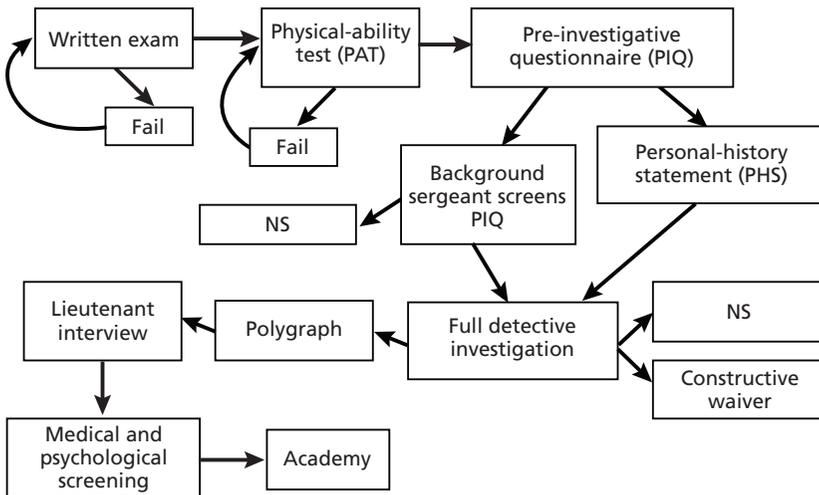
ten test and entry into the academy. Figure 7.1 outlines the flow of this process.

Applying to become an SDPD officer means taking the written examination. Being the initial step, the written exam occupies a key position in this process. Therefore, we dedicate Chapter Nine to discussion of the written test itself. Those who fail the test are notified within one or two days and may retake the test as many times as they wish.

Those who pass are eligible to take the PAT. Candidates wear a three-pound vest and run a timed, 500-yard obstacle course designed to reflect police work. The course involves dodging objects, climbing ladders and stairs, running, overcoming walls that are three feet, four feet, and six feet tall, and lifting and dragging a 155-pound dummy.

After completing the PAT, candidates complete the PIQ. This 52-page questionnaire initiates the background-investigation process by asking candidates questions about prior employment, drug-use history, medical history, involvement in the civil- or criminal-justice

**Figure 7.1**  
**Overview of the Recruit-Screening Process**



NOTE: NS = nonselect.

system, and financial health. Applicants are also asked to take home and complete a personal-history statement (PHS) giving more extensive records and references.

On the next workday, background-investigation sergeants screen all of the PIQs for any obvious disqualifying responses. Most commonly, these are excessive amounts of debt, recent or serious drug use, or a large number of automobile tickets or accidents. At this stage, the information on the PIQ is not checked for accuracy but taken however the applicant has disclosed it.

Applicants passing this preliminary background screening are referred to background detectives, who run a variety of standard checks from the Department of Motor Vehicles, criminal records, and credit ratings and the checks that an employer would normally do when considering an applicant, such as contact previous employers and any references the applicant listed. The detective examines the applicant's PIQ, any comments the sergeant noted, and the PHS and interviews the applicant in person. If the applicant provides incomplete information, does not show up for the interview, or withdraws the application, the detective issues a constructive waiver indicating that the case is closed but that SDPD found nothing at that stage that would disqualify the applicant from police work. An applicant receives one phone call from SDPD before a detective issues the constructive waiver. Given the volume of cases, SDPD has determined that additional reminder calls are not worth the effort. If the applicant does not meet minimum requirements, the applicant is disqualified, a fairly rare outcome of the process. The more common finding is that the applicant does not meet certain standards set by POST. POST requires that viable candidates meet criteria in the areas of integrity, substance abuse, stress tolerance, attention to safety, learning ability, conscientiousness, decisionmaking and judgment, communication, interpersonal skills, and overcoming problems. A finding that an applicant does not meet any of these criteria closes the case. Those who pass this stage are considered viable and move to a final stage of interviews and exams.

In the final stage of the application process, the viable candidates complete polygraph tests, interviews with the lieutenant of the back-

ground and recruiting division, and undergo medical and psychological examinations.

## **Analysis of the Screening Process**

### **Demographics of SDPD Applicants**

RAND obtained data on those who, between January and August 2007, took the written test for a police officer–recruit position. These data included records on 1,335 applicants. However, those who fail the written test may retake the test multiple times, and the data do not distinguish who is taking the test for the first time from those who are retaking it. As a result, the figures in this section may overrepresent groups, such as those who live in San Diego, that are more likely to retake the test if failed initially.

The data contained information on the applicant’s test outcome, race and ethnicity, sex, and ZIP Code and state of their home of record. The race data contained several detailed categories, which limited the statistical analysis that could be performed for race groups with few applicants. We therefore recoded this information into four mutually exclusive categories: white, black, Hispanic, and all other racial and ethnic groups. We then crossed these categories with sex to make eight race/sex categories. Because the number of applicants who listed a home ZIP Code outside San Diego County was relatively small, the geographic information was recoded to indicate whether a person resided in San Diego County, some other part of California, or somewhere outside California. Since the data do not identify applicants who initially fail the test and retake it again at least once, we could not accurately compute pass rates. Pass rates from these data would underestimate the likelihood of passing the test for groups that are more likely to retake the exam. A more useful measure, which San Diego’s city testing service should pursue, is to calculate eventual pass rates for those who apply.

Table 7.1 describes the demographic and geographic composition of the applicants. Whites comprised the largest racial or ethnic group (48 percent), followed by Hispanics (32 percent); blacks comprised the

**Table 7.1**  
**Descriptive Statistics: Written-Test Takers for SDPD Police Officer–Recruit Positions, January–August 2007**

Characteristic	Percentage	95% Confidence Interval	
		Low	High
By sex and racial or ethnic group			
White	48	45	51
Female	9	6	11
Black	8	7	10
Female	12	6	18
Hispanic	32	29	34
Female	14	10	17
Other race	12	10	14
Female	8	4	12
Total female	10	9	12
By location			
San Diego County	78	75	80
Other California	15	13	17
Other region	7	6	9

NOTE: The 95-percent confidence intervals, which indicate a range of values computed based on the sample in such a way as to contain the true percentage 95 percent of the time, suggest the uncertainty in these estimates. N = 1,335.

smallest group at just over 8 percent of the total. About 10 percent of test takers were female. However, the distribution of women was not equal across racial and ethnic groups; among Hispanic and black applicants, there was a slightly higher proportion of women than among white applicants and applicants from other racial groups. Nonetheless, black women comprised less than 1 percent of the total test takers, as did women from the other nonwhite groups.

The vast majority of applicants (78 percent) gave a San Diego ZIP Code for their home of record, although this is likely an overestimate,

since local applicants are more likely to be among those who retake the test if they fail it. Almost 15 percent came from other parts of California. As Table 7.2 shows, applicants from outside California were more likely to be white than were those from within California. By contrast, the proportion of female test takers did not vary significantly by geographic region.

Of those seated at any particular test, about 62 percent pass the exam.<sup>1</sup> Again, since our data do not indicate which applicants are seated to retake the test, this figure is an underestimate of the *first-attempt pass rate* (the percentage of applicants who pass on their first try) and the *eventual pass rate* (the percentage of applicants who eventually pass the written exam).

### Post-Written Test Outcomes

RAND additionally obtained data on 1,082 SDPD police officer–recruit applicants who passed the written test and returned a PIQ between January and mid-October 2007. These data were used to analyze patterns of hires and nonhires through two stages of the application process: the sergeants’ review and full review by a detective.

**Table 7.2**  
**Racial Distribution of the City of San Diego and SDPD Written-Test Takers, by Geographic Area**

Racial or Ethnic Group	Percentage				Overall
	City of San Diego (2000 Census)	San Diego County	Other California	Other Region	
White	49	46	48	72	48
Black	8	9	8	7	9
Hispanic	23	33	31	14	32
Other	20	12	13	7	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100

<sup>1</sup> The pass rate for California’s POST Entry-Level Law Enforcement Test Battery is 79 percent, assuming the POST-recommended pass-point of 42 points.

In addition to the personal information contained in the written-test data, these data also included applicants' year of birth, from which we calculated applicants' age on the day on which their PIQ packet was received. Applicants' ages ranged from 20 to 56; however, the mean age was 27.7, and 90 percent of applicants were younger than age 37. We therefore organized the applicants into four age groups: 20 to 24 years, 25 to 29 years, 30 to 34 years, and 35 years and older.

We analyzed outcomes in two stages. First, we assessed whether an applicant's PIQ packet made it past a reviewing sergeant for full evaluation by a detective. Second, conditional on making it past a sergeant's review, we assessed whether an applicant (1) was hired, (2) received a constructive waiver,<sup>2</sup> (3) received some other form of waiver, or (4) was rejected for a disqualifying PIQ finding. Because the sergeant's review occurs very soon after an application is received, we include both open and closed applications in this phase of the analysis.

### **Analysis of the Background-Investigation Sergeants**

Two background-investigation sergeants disqualified from further review slightly less than half of all applicants who passed the written test (46 percent); 54 percent received a positive decision and had their applications passed on for a full review by a detective. The geographic variation observed for written-test pass rates did not emerge in the sergeants' outcomes. Applications from San Diegans, other Californians, and non-Californians all had a statistically equal likelihood of getting passed on to the detectives. We also observed very few race and sex differences in the sergeants' outcome data; the notable exception is that applications from black men were slightly less likely to get passed on to the detectives than were those of applicants from other racial or ethnic and sex groups. Of the applications received from black men, 44 percent were passed on to detectives for a full investigation, compared to 54 percent for members of all other groups combined. Data on the exact reasons for not passing some cases on to the detectives were not

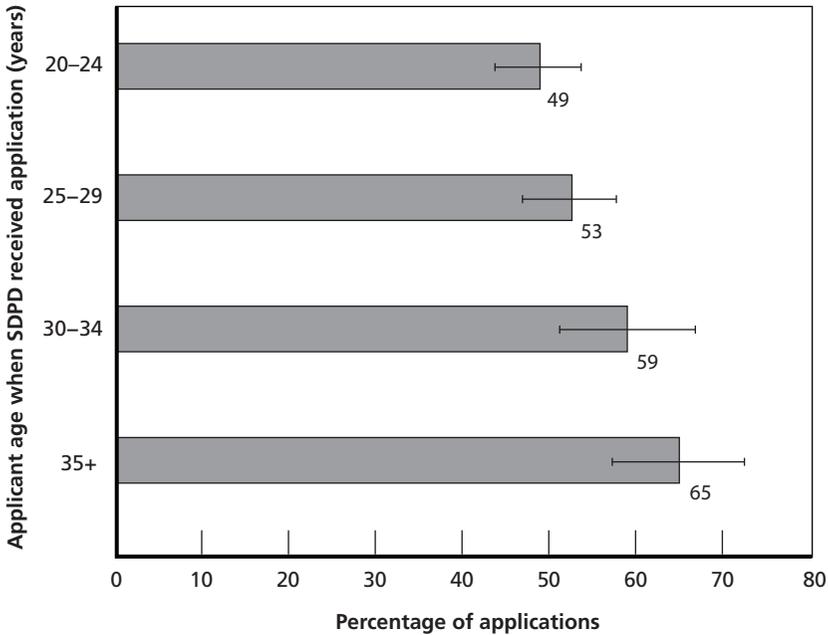
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<sup>2</sup> SDPD issues a constructive waiver when the applicant has not been disqualified but has withdrawn the application, failed to appear for the PAT, did not complete application material (PIQ and PHS), or did not appear for an interview.

readily available,<sup>3</sup> so we cannot determine whether this racial discrepancy is due to race, some other disqualifying feature, or another factor not considered. The sergeant’s review at this stage is based just on the content of the applicant’s PIQ and not on knowing or seeing the individual. The PIQ records the applicant’s race on the first page. SDPD could achieve complete race-blindness at this stage of the process by removing this likely unnecessary field from the sergeants’ review.

The data also indicate that older applicants are more likely to get passed on to the detectives than younger ones. Figure 7.2 shows the

**Figure 7.2**  
**Percentage of Applications That Passed Sergeants’ Review, by Age Group**



NOTE: The lines represent 95-percent confidence intervals for the estimated percentages.

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<sup>3</sup> Background investigators indicated that the most common reasons were for financial or credit issues, drug use that was recent or intense, and an excessive number of traffic infractions or accidents.

probability that an application was passed on to the detectives, by age group. While the probability of passing the sergeants' review generally increases with age, the differences between consecutive age groups are trivial. Applications from the oldest applicants (35 years and above) are 33 percent more likely to get passed on to the detectives than those of applicants in the youngest group (20 to 24) or the next-youngest group (25 to 29). However, there were no significant differences between the 20–24 and 25–29 groups or between the 30–34 and 35+ groups. These age differences were virtually unchanged after adjusting for race, sex, and geography (results not shown). It should be noted, however, that adjusting for age category reduced the percentage of black male applicants who were passed on to the detectives from 44 to 41 percent. This occurs because the average age of black male applicants is significantly higher than that of applicants from other racial or sex groups (30.7 years, compared to 27.6 for all other applicants and 27.7 for all other male applicants).

### **Detectives' Decisions**

Table 7.3 shows the descriptive statistics for applicants who passed the sergeants' screening and were given a full investigation by the detectives and for the final disposition of their applications. Because this phase of the application process takes considerably longer than the sergeants' review phase, 97 applications were still open and awaiting a final decision. These tended to be newer cases, having turned in their PIQ packet an average of 43 days prior to the data cutoff date of October 18, 2007, compared to 154 days for applications that were closed or awaiting assignment to the police academy. These applications were thus excluded from the analysis of detectives' decisions, as were three cases listed as being in the applicant pool.

As the previous section suggests, with the exception of a decrease in the proportion of black men, the demographics of applicants who make it past the sergeants' review are very similar to the demographics of those who passed the written test. White men make up a majority of all applicants at this phase (54 percent), followed by Hispanic men (23 percent). The drop-off in black men resulted in a larger proportion of women in this group, although the overall distribution of

**Table 7.3**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Applicants Reviewed by Detectives**

Characteristic	Percentage of Pool	95% Confidence Interval	
		Low	High
Women as portion of racial or ethnic group			
White	59	55	64
Female	9	6	13
Black	6	4	8
Female	21	5	38
Hispanic	26	22	30
Female	11	5	16
Other race	9	7	12
Female	9	0	18
Total female	10	7	13
By age group (years)			
20–24	34	30	38
25–29	31	27	35
30–34	16	13	20
35+	19	15	22
By home location			
San Diego County	75	71	79
Other California	16	13	19
Other region	9	7	12
By result			
Hired	22	18	25
Constructive waiver	13	10	16
Other waiver	15	12	18
Negative NS POST finding	50	46	55

SOURCE: SDPD recruiting data for January–October 2007. N = 481.

women across all racial and ethnic groups was not different at a statistically significant level. The majority of applicants were from San Diego; moreover, while the California regions have significantly more Hispanics than non-California regions (27 percent compared to 9 percent), regional differences in other nonwhite racial and ethnic groups were not statistically significant.

SDPD hired 22 percent of the applicants whom sergeants did not reject and whose applications a detective reviewed. Detectives reported negative NS POST<sup>4</sup> findings for 50 percent of these applicants and waived another 15 percent. The remaining 13 percent received constructive waivers.

As shown in Figure 7.3, the likelihood of being hired differed significantly across racial and ethnic groups. Approximately 25 percent of applicants categorized as “other” for race and ethnicity who were reviewed by detectives were hired, compared to 14 percent of Hispanic and 7 percent of black applicants. Statistically, the hiring rates for Hispanics and blacks were the same, as were the rates for whites and non-Hispanic and nonblack minorities. The small number of female applicants in the black and nonwhite, non-Hispanic groups precludes a thorough investigation of sex differences within racial and ethnic groups. However, male and female differences in hiring were not observed between the two largest racial and ethnic groups (whites and Hispanics) or among all the groups pooled together. Differences in hiring across regions were large—only 14 percent of non-Californians were hired, compared to 22 percent of Californians overall—but not statistically significant.

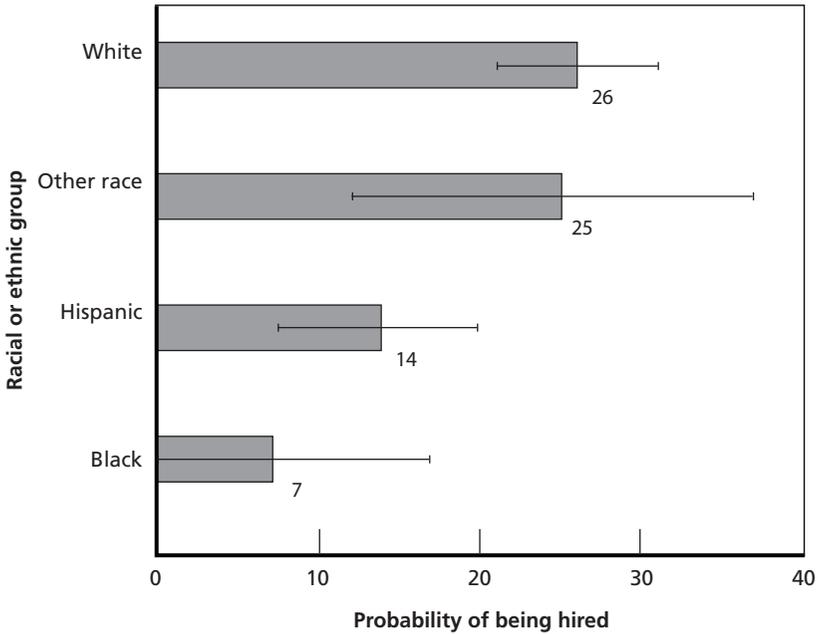
As seen in Table 7.4, applicants in the youngest age group were more likely to get hired than those in older age groups. This reverses the pattern of sergeants' decisions. While the probability of getting hired generally declines with age, the differences across groups of applicants who are older than 24 are not statistically significant.<sup>5</sup> Of

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<sup>4</sup> NS POST, non-select on a POST dimension, indicates that the applicant was not selected because he or she did not meet one or more of the standards set by POST.

<sup>5</sup> In light of the observation that black male applicants tend to be older than other applicants, we also adjusted estimates of hiring by both race and age simultaneously. The adjusted

**Figure 7.3**  
**Percentage of Those Who Passed the Sergeants' Review Who Were Hired**



NOTE: The lines represent 95-percent confidence intervals for the estimated percentages.

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applicants who passed the written and physical tests, the youngest ones appear slightly more likely to be hired, though the observed differences across age groups may be due to chance variation in the applicants during this particular period.

Among applicants who were not hired, little systematic demographic or geographic variation was observed in the reasons for not being offered a job. One significant exception is sex. As seen in Table 7.5, women were 2.6 times more likely than men to get a constructive waiver. This suggests that many women who had enough interest

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results did not differ appreciably from the raw observations and are not shown here.

**Table 7.4**  
**Rates of Passing the Sergeants' Review and Being Hired, by Age Group**

Rate	Age Group (years)			
	20–24	25–29	30–34	35+
Percentage passing the sergeants' review (of those who passed the written and physical tests)	49	53	59	65
Percentage hired (of those who passed the sergeants' review)	29	20	19	14
Percentage hired (of those who passed the written and physical tests)	14	11	11	9

**Table 7.5**  
**Results of Background Investigations for Those Not Hired, by Sex**

Result	Male	Female	Total
Negative NS POST finding	67	45	65
Constructive waiver	14	37	16
Other waiver	19	18	19
Total	100	100	100

in SDPD to take the written and physical exams are either opting for other agencies or not pursuing a law-enforcement career after all.

Currently, there is no coordination between the background investigators and recruiters on applicants receiving constructive waivers. When an applicant withdraws from the process or fails to complete the PHS, the background investigator has a reasonable incentive to issue a constructive waiver and turn to the remaining background cases that need to be cleared. An applicant who fails to complete some part of the process receives one phone call from the background detectives notifying him or her that the application is not complete and reminding him or her of the two-week deadline to complete the PHS. SDPD is flexible if the applicant returns the detective's call, explains the reason for the delay, and negotiates another reasonable due date for application materials. Those applicants who do not make that effort receive construc-

tive waivers.<sup>6</sup> A potentially more productive strategy would be to refer the case to a recruiter, who can passionately make a good case for an SDPD career. The recruiter could make a last pitch to encourage the applicant to stay with the process or at least learn why the applicant did not persist through the process. These applicants have already cleared a substantial number of hurdles, and an additional investment by SDPD seems warranted. In addition, given that constructive waivers are given disproportionately to female applicants, additional follow-up at this stage could lead to a greater representation of women at SDPD.

Informally, we heard the suggestion that, if applicants are not willing to complete the process, they are probably not the kind of officer that SDPD would want. Until that impression is validated, we see these constructive waivers as missed opportunities, especially since they have a greater effect on female applicants, a group from which it is already a challenge to recruit. Since, at this stage, SDPD has made no commitment to the applicant, neither should SDPD expect commitment from the applicant at this stage. To assess whether these applicants are, in fact, still viable, SDPD could run a short experiment. One background detective could be paired with one recruiter. Whenever the detective would normally make that one call to remind the applicant of the risk of being dropped from the process, instead the recruiter takes on that task. If, perhaps, those applicants had been nonresponsive because they are entertaining offers from other agencies, an effective recruiter may be able to regain the applicant's interest in SDPD. If the recruiter has no more success than the background investigator usually has, this would validate the current SDPD practice of dropping these applicants from consideration.

Along the same line, two RAND researchers took and passed SDPD's written exam, a process described more fully in Chapter Eight. As part of the research plan, they did not show up for the PAT. They received no subsequent contact from SDPD except for a note indicating that their application had been closed. Again, allowing interested

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<sup>6</sup> The test scores are valid for one year, so the applicant could restart the process at the same stage without having to take the written and physical exams again.

and potentially eligible applicants to slip out of the process seems an unfortunate loss.

## **Hirability of Written-Test Takers**

Knowing the percentage of applicants who make it through the three major steps of the application process (conditional on surviving the previous step), we estimate the probability that an applicant from a hypothetical cohort who passed the written and physical tests will be hired. Table 7.6 reports the results of these estimates for all candidates and by racial and ethnic, sex, and geographic groups.

Assuming that the observed rate at which applicants pass each step does not change in the future, 12 percent of those who pass the written and physical tests are ultimately hired. The likelihood of getting hired for blacks and Hispanics is generally lower than that of whites and of applicants in the "other" racial and ethnic category, resulting from their relatively low rates of passing the full background investigation.

## **Summary**

The process of becoming an SDPD officer has multiple stages, each of which presents an opportunity to more carefully screen out unqualified applicants as well as lose potentially strong candidates.

After the written test, the subsequent review by background-investigation detectives screens out many candidates for financial issues, drug or criminal histories, traffic tickets and accidents, and other issues. We made no attempt to second-guess these decisions. However, we did note that, for those applicants who fail to complete some part of the process, SDPD background detectives give one reminder phone call before closing their application. While an applicant's inability to complete materials in a timely manner may indicate that this is the wrong person for SDPD, alternate explanations, such as competing offers from other departments, may also be valid. We witnessed the strong salesmanship of SDPD recruiters and recommend that SDPD

**Table 7.6**  
**Estimated Probability of Positive Sergeant Review and of Hiring After**  
**Detective Review**

Group	Pass Sergeant (passed written test and PAT)	Get Hired (passed sergeants)	Overall Probability of Being Hired
All applicants	54	22	12
By racial or ethnic group			
White	55	26	14
Black	47	7	3
Hispanic	54	14	8
Other race	50	25	12
By sex			
Male	54	22	12
Female	50	20	10
By home location			
San Diego County	54	23	12
Other California	53	21	11
Other region	50	14	7

NOTE: Pass rates for the written test are computed based on data from San Diego city testing of 1,335 applications between January and August 2007. The remaining calculations are based on SDPD's background and recruiting data on 1,082 applicants who passed the written and physical exams between January and October 2007.

experiment with having recruiters make the last pitch to these applicants before closing the case.

## The Written Exam

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### Introduction

Chapter Seven presented and analyzed SDPD’s application process. Given the importance of taking and passing the written exam as the initial step in the application process, this chapter is dedicated to the discussion of the importance, content, and pass point of this exam.

### Importance of the Exam

There has been little research on the effectiveness of written exams for selecting quality officers. Gaines and Falkenberg (1998) examined the properties of one written exam used nationwide by several police agencies (not SDPD). They found that the exam was too easy to be useful in separating high and low performers, performance on 28 test items suggested that they were poorly written or otherwise problematic, and other measures of academic performance, such as years of education, would have resulted in a more racially representative pool of candidates. However, efforts to directly address racial disparities sometime lead to tests stripped of components that measure important job-related tasks (Gottfredson, 1996).

POST mandates that every applicant for employment as a law-enforcement officer take a written exam—typically the first step in the application process—to test reading and writing ability “at the level necessary to perform the job of peace officer” (POST regulation 1002[a][9]). POST does not mandate any specific test, nor does it pro-

vide guidance on setting acceptable levels of competence. At SDPD, applying to be an officer means taking San Diego's written exam. As our analysis in Chapter Seven indicated, this initial stage also screens out nearly 40 percent of the applicants, although those who fail may retake the test multiple times. Therefore, it is critical that the exam be an effective screening tool, correctly screening out candidates without the skills necessary to be a police officer but passing those candidates with the right skills.

## **Content of the Exam**

We requested access to the SDPD written exam to understand the skills that the test assesses and to assess the reading level. As with all civil-service tests, the exams are closely guarded, and public release of the exams would result in a costly process of development of a new test. We did not press this issue with city testing, but instead sent two RAND researchers to take the exam and detail their assessment of the exam.

Before describing the RAND researchers' experience with the test, we first note that designing a good test is an extremely difficult undertaking. The Educational Testing Service® (2003), for example, has extensive guidelines and analyses to ensure that its tests are fair and have no questions that would be biased against any population or in favor of another. These guidelines require the elimination of questions that are elitist (e.g., pertaining to yachts or junk bonds), are specialized (e.g., military, farming, technical, or legal vocabulary), or include region-specific language (e.g., parkway, hoagie, Sigalert). Test development also requires sophisticated analysis known as differential item functioning (DIF) (Angoff, 1982, 1993). DIF, described in more detail later in this chapter, assesses differences on particular test items for individuals in different groups, such as racial groups, that received similar scores on the test as a whole. This analysis can aid in the identification of items for which members of a particular group have a disadvantage not because of a lack of an ability that the test is designed to measure but because of cultural differences. The military does similarly

rigorous testing of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). Therefore, it is a daunting task for a single city to develop its own exam.

This difficulty suggests that California should settle on a single statewide written exam for police officers. Because there is no standardized exam, San Diego must invest in a substantial effort to maintain a test bank, pretest exams, and analyze tests for problems. This is a burden and an effort that should be shared with all California agencies rather than being shouldered by San Diego.

California POST offers the POST Entry-Level Test Battery. For example, the San Francisco Police Department and the Riverside County Sheriff's Office both use this test. Other large departments, including those in Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Diego, design their own written exams. There is no cost to departments to use the POST test, yet these departments have found that the current POST process is too restrictive to meet their needs. POST mails exam copies about one week before the scheduled test. Completed exams must then be mailed back to POST for scoring, though POST is examining the feasibility of local scoring. POST requires that it receive the scores to guarantee accuracy of the scoring and to scale the test to a constant level of difficulty across versions. Turnaround time for scoring is one day. Results received at POST in the morning will usually be received by the sending agency later that day. Results are faxed immediately after the scoring of the test.

Even with POST's rather prompt scoring reports, for some SDPD applicants, the timeline presents a problem. SDPD needs to contact those failing a Friday-morning test to instruct them not to show for the PAT on Saturday. For a switch to the POST test to be practical for SDPD, POST needs even faster turnaround times, SDPD needs to move the Friday test to another date, or SDPD needs to ask all Friday test takers to appear for the PAT even though some might find out the following Monday that they have failed the written test. The latter sug-

gestion may put a strain on the PAT, since roughly 20 percent more people would show up for it.<sup>1</sup>

The POST test itself has some advantages. In addition to relieving San Diego from the tasks of creating, testing, and analyzing its tests, the POST test comes with a study guide, and there are third-party preparation materials available. The disadvantages of the test mostly involve the difficulty of relying on an outside organization to promptly deliver exam copies and return the scores. As we discuss later, we are as critical of content in the POST test as we are of SDPD's test. Lastly, POST's most recent strategic plan (POST, 2007) lists its top goal as "[raising] the bar on selection and training standards." The proposals include requiring degrees beyond high school and stricter reading and writing standards; neither of these necessarily guarantees that quality officers will result. SDPD and other California agencies struggling with recruiting need to be active participants in these discussions; otherwise, new POST regulations could further hamper successful recruiting programs.

As to the exam as currently required in San Diego, the exam consists of 75 multiple-choice questions, and applicants have two hours and 15 minutes to complete it. The exam tests reading comprehension, attention to detail, decisionmaking, grammar, and writing.

The first section, on reading comprehension, begins with a series of paragraphs describing policing activities, such as firearm training, vehicle-pursuit protocols, and the definition and appropriate punishment for grand theft auto. Questions relating to these paragraphs ask the applicant which of a given set of statements are true or which statements best summarize the main point of the paragraph. Both RAND researchers believed that this was the most difficult portion of the test. Some of the paragraphs were awkwardly written, making answering the questions unnecessarily difficult. Some passages, especially those using such terms as *grand theft auto*, while relevant to police work,

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<sup>1</sup> With the current schedule, those passing the written test on the prior Saturday or Wednesday would appear with all Friday test takers for the Saturday PAT. If each test has roughly equal numbers of test takers and pass rates near 62 percent, the PAT will have an excess of attendees by  $(1 - 0.62)/(3 \times 0.62) = 20$  percent.

seemed to be above the reading-comprehension level of many high-school graduates. An analysis by Michael D. White (2008) found that reading level is a powerful predictor of recruits' academy performance, more than college education or military experience. Furthermore, Fyfe and Kane (2006) showed that officers fired from the New York City Police Department tended to perform slightly worse in academy training. Combined, this suggests that assessing reading comprehension is a reasonable method for screening applicants. The necessary level, though, has yet to be determined. Such terms as *probable cause* (a term on the POST practice test) and *larceny* should not be expected to be in an applicant's vocabulary. The academy provides substantial training and testing, so screening by an applicant's understanding of complex policing issues using technical language may be counterproductive.

The second section tests the applicant's attention to detail—for example, listing a series of similarly spelled names and asking the applicant to select the name of the person with a particular feature. The third section covers decisionmaking, giving applicants a passage of regulatory language and asking them whether that regulation applied to a certain scenario. RAND researchers had no particular issues with these two sections.

The fourth section addresses spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. For example, the test might ask for the correct spelling of *incident*, with offered alternatives, such as *incedent* or *incidant*. The exam also asks which in a set of sentences has proper punctuation. We find it highly unfortunate for candidates to fail the exam for missing such questions. First, SDPD reports are all completed in Microsoft® Word®, and training the officers to run the spellchecker on each submitted report is a trivial matter. Word flags all of the various misspellings of *incident* and offers the correct spelling as the first suggestion. Second, writing police reports is a special skill learned at the academy and on the job. For example, pronouns are largely discouraged. The POST practice test includes the example sentence, "Jail is not a pleasant place to be, but they do get their basic necessities met." Test takers are supposed to indicate that *they* is too vague, and, indeed, it is out of context, but training in police report-writing will teach police recruits to eliminate pronouns. Rather than test for this ability, a technological solution,

such as a Microsoft Word plug-in that highlights pronouns in reports, can resolve this if it is a persistent problem.

Regardless of whether the test content changes, many candidates enter the test with little or no idea about what it covers. SDPD's Web site contains some information, and, when contacted, SDPD recruiters accurately described the sections of the test. This information, however, does not substitute for practice materials and sample exams. The city's personnel division is in the process of preparing a study guide for the written test. This will be a valuable resource for the department, as it may improve pass rates by better preparing candidates. However, this guide is unlikely to be available for several months, an unfortunate situation for a department that needs recruits now. A partial remedy is to post sample questions immediately on the SDPD recruiting Web site. While this is imperfect relative to a complete study guide, this should be an inexpensive step toward that end and provide current prospective candidates with some way of preparing for the exam.

## **Analysis of Test Items**

As Chapter Seven noted, 62 percent of test takers will pass any particular test, although those who fail may eventually pass, since they may retake the test. Since the written test controls the supply of potential recruits, ensuring that the test items are highly polished and the test is presented in a positive environment is of great importance. Research on effective test construction provides two useful strategies.

First, we recommend that city testing complete a DIF analysis of its tests. This analysis flags test items for which certain groups of test takers have a disproportionately lower rate of answering correctly. For example, test items that use regional phrases (e.g., hoagie) or slang particular to a certain culture may disadvantage one test-taking group, even though failure to understand the term is not predictive of job performance. Even though the test has been closely reviewed, some problematic test items might not surface until a proper analysis of applicant responses reveals group differences. DIF analysis flags test items that, for example, San Diego area test takers are more likely to answer cor-

rectly than are non–San Diego–area test takers who perform similarly to the San Diego–area test takers on other items. MULTILOG® and PARSCALE™, distributed by Scientific Software International, are two widely accepted software packages that, among other features, include tools for DIF analysis.

Second, studies have found that black test takers who were told that a test measured their mental abilities did worse than black test takers taking the same test who were told that the test did not measure intellect (Steele and Aronson, 1995; McKay, Doverspike, Bowen-Hilton, and Martin, 2002). McKay and Doverspike (2001) offered three important recommendations to remediate this. *Test-wiseness training* entails familiarizing test takers with the test, its content, and its format (Berliner and Casanova, 1986). Not surprisingly, studies have shown that taking practice tests can improve scores (Kulik, Kulik, and Bangert, 1984; Powers and Swinton, 1982). Theory suggests that familiarity reduces test anxiety, which, particularly for black test takers, reduces the stereotype threat (the fear of substantiating a negative stereotype by poor test performance). The second of McKay and Doverspike's recommendations is to consider alternative testing presentations and formats. Presenting the exam as a measure of problem-solving ability rather than a test of intellectual ability may reduce the black-white gap in passing rates. The third recommendation is to develop a test that nonwhite applicants will perceive as having strong validity on its face, primarily by giving questions that, to the test taker, are clearly related to the expected job-related tasks.

This research suggests that San Diego should have a continuous process of quality checks on written exams, provides additional evidence that a sample test is urgently needed, and shows that altering the exam's presentation can by itself improve scores.

## The Pass Point

The written test screens out 40 percent of applicants at the initial stage of the recruiting process. Those 40 percent are allowed to retake the written exam, but only those most eager to join SDPD will do so.

Many might simply not wish to repeat the process. A natural question is whether otherwise viable candidates are among those who failed the written exam.

The city testing service sets the pass point of the test based on the Angoff method (see Angoff, 1971, p. 515). For each item, subject-matter experts estimate the probability that a minimally competent test taker would get the item right. The pass point is set at the average of the sums of the judges' probability estimates. If the judges can accurately assess these probabilities, this is a sensible method. However, several studies have suggested that having experts judging each item can result in overestimates of the probability that a viable candidate would correctly answer difficult questions (Bejar, 1983). Other educational-testing researchers have suggested that the Angoff method might be useful to produce an initial pass point but that its validity should be checked by examining those candidates with scores just above the pass point (Kane, 1994). If those just above the pass point still fare well in the rest of the screening process and show proficiency in the academy, this suggests that the pass point is set too high and should be recalibrated. This is not being done in San Diego.

While we could not track the "barely passed" applicants through the process, we checked the records of those who entered but did not complete the academy. For the 71st and 72nd academies, the first academies of 2007, there were no failures for academic reasons. There was one academic failure in the most recent academy. Some who did not fail left because of the physical demands or a realization that police work was not for them, but they rarely left because they could not complete the academic coursework. This is evidence that the recruiting process is extremely effective—we suggest that it is *too* effective—at screening out anyone at risk for an academic failure. The written test is essentially the only component of the recruiting process aimed at assessing academic ability. If the test is predictive of performance at the academy, lowering the pass point would increase the risk that new recruits will fail coursework at the academy. That is an entirely acceptable risk if, at the same time, additional qualified applicants become SDPD police officers.

Lowering the pass point conservatively, perhaps a 5-percent reduction in the pass point, will allow SDPD to ascertain whether the current applicant-screening standard has been too aggressive. We recommend that the pass point be lowered by a few points and that city testing communicate to SDPD who scores above the new pass point but below the old pass point. These applicants should then be monitored through the recruiting process and academy, without revealing their test-score status to investigators or academy instructors. It is possible that these applicants who otherwise would have failed the written test will be screened out in the background check; in that case, the written test acts to save background-detective resources. However, if these applicants clear the background process and the academy at the same rate as those scoring above the old pass point, this is evidence that the pass point had been set too high and has been screening out too many viable candidates. Subject to regulations, this change in the pass point could be made retroactive, instantly providing a new group of candidates.

During the study period, we heard from several sources that any changes that would “lower standards” would be unacceptable. However, we have not heard a convincing argument or seen compelling evidence that those who score just below the current pass point are unlikely to be among SDPD’s best officers. SDPD allows the applicant to retake the test multiple times, but rejection the first time around is sure to discourage many from trying a second time. We realize that the lowering of the pass point, no matter how slight, may meet resistance. An alternative strategy that is less ideal, but still of use, would be to compare those who scored barely above the pass point with those who scored well above the pass point. If these two groups do not differ on important performance measures, such as passing the background check, scoring well on academy-theory and practical exams, and field-training evaluations, there would be little evidence that the pass point is an effective tool for screening out unqualified applicants.

## Summary

The written exam is the first step in the application process, and, as a result of this position, it occupies a critical step in the recruiting process. If the test is not measuring applicants on dimensions that are important for police work or has a pass point that is too conservative, SDPD may be forfeiting the opportunity to employ high-quality candidates.

We recognize that producing high-quality tests that are predictive of job performance and free of bias is challenging. We recommend that San Diego complete a DIF analysis of the current and future tests to flag test items that may be problematic. In addition, we recommend that SDPD post a sample test, which, as our literature review showed, can be particularly effective at improving a department's diversity.

The city relies on the Angoff method to set the pass point. Several studies suggest that pass points set in this manner should be used as a guide and then subsequent analysis—for example, an analysis of those who barely passed—should verify that the selected pass point is not too high or too low. The extreme rarity of academic failures at the academy suggests that the pass point may, in fact, be set too high.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

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Based on our analysis of SDPD recruiting practices, we offer the following recommendations to strengthen the department's recruiting. These fall into three categories:

1. Target recruiting practices to appeal to a broader range of applicants.
2. Improve efficiency in the screening process.
3. Strengthen the recruiting workforce and the practices they follow.

We discuss each in more detail in this chapter.

### **Target Recruiting Appeals to a Broader Range of Applicants**

#### **Produce Marketing Materials That Highlight the Benefits of Law-Enforcement Careers and SDPD in Particular**

Our surveys of written-test takers indicates that applicants are strongly motivated by a desire to serve the community, the anticipation of the pride they will derive from being a police officer, and an interest in securing stable employment and a good salary. The immediate goal of these materials should be to convince prospective recruits to show up at the written test and for successful test takers to follow through by taking the PAT and turning in a background questionnaire—they are not intended to encourage prospective applicants to evaluate their

qualifications and dissuade them from applying if they think they do not qualify. Nonetheless, current marketing materials highlight the job-eligibility requirements and the obstacles to becoming a police officer. Instead, marketing materials should emphasize how employment with SDPD is consistent with applicants' expectations of a career in law enforcement: that they will be serving their community, that they will be a member of a respected and prestigious professional organization, and that they will enjoy job security, a salary comparable to what San Diego college graduates are making, and generous benefits. These materials should be provided to all police officers with space for officers to provide information, such as their own name, recruitment-office information, and the date and time of the next written test.

### **Modernize the SDPD Recruiting Web Site**

The SDPD recruiting Web site lacks the professional design quality featured on the Web sites of other law-enforcement agencies that compete for prospective applicants. We do not think the site needs to be a spectacular multimedia experience, but it should at least reflect the professionalism of SDPD itself. SDPD is fully aware of this and has actively sought the means to revamp the site. SDPD background and recruiting staff will need substantial control, if not ownership, over content to regularly update test dates and sample test material. It should also relegate discussions of the formal requirements for police employment and the obstacles to joining SDPD to an FAQ section rather than link directly to these on the main page. Instead, the substantive focus should be on converting information seekers and casual visitors into applicants and written-test takers, communicating where and when the next written test will occur, and delivering the recruiting message in greater detail than print materials allow. For example, the attractiveness of working for SDPD could be underscored by emphasizing its diversity of opportunities with descriptions of a variety of specialties and by detailing SDPD pay and benefits relative to what is normally available in occupations that do not require a college degree. We recommend that San Diego contract with a Web-design firm to polish the site.

### **Focus Recruiting Efforts Close to San Diego and Carefully Selected Sites Nationally**

Research on migration suggests that moving long distances for employment is a relatively rare event. In addition, current migration trends are working against San Diego—more people are moving out of the area than are coming in. Together, these factors suggest that SDPD will have a difficult time convincing prospective applicants to move to the San Diego area from far away. At the same time, the prospects for more effective local recruiting are encouraging, in spite of applicant shortfalls in recent years. SDPD, and law enforcement in general, pays well relative to employment opportunities for young people without college degrees. Nonetheless, discussions with community organizations indicated that the salary figures for SDPD officers were not well known. Though SDPD officers received a salary increase in 2007, a 2006 study reported that SDPD compensation was nearly the lowest among nearby law-enforcement agencies (SDPD and Buck Consultants, 2006). While the salary differences may present a barrier for recruiting to some degree, SDPD offers significant advantages over several of the other organizations, such as diversity of assignments and opportunities for promotion, so SDPD can still remain competitive with these other agencies for new recruits.

Targeted nonlocal recruiting efforts can supplement local recruiting efforts. Sorting criminal-justice programs based on the ratio of nearby police-officer jobs to the number of program graduates can identify programs that are producing students in excess of what the local law-enforcement labor market can absorb. We have delivered a spreadsheet tool to help SDPD sort these programs to identify prospective nonlocal recruiting sites.

### **Use SDPD's Internal Labor as a Pool of Candidates**

SDPD should formalize a process for using some of its civilian workforce as a recruiting source. Those interested in SDPD police-officer positions who are not yet eligible (e.g., they do not meet age requirements, they need to resolve credit or financial solvency issues, they have not reached the time limitations on past minor drug use) should be actively recruited into “feeder” positions, such as traffic management

or records. SDPD recruiters already utilize these positions when possible. This type of employment arrangement can maintain prospective applicants' interest in SDPD until they become eligible to enter the academy. Implementing this type of program will require the coordination of recruiters and background investigators to identify potential future officers who can be redirected to other SDPD positions. Subsequently, they will need to be tracked for future follow-up at the appropriate time for a police-recruit position. Many of these positions at SDPD require the applicant to pass the same background standards and checks as the police-officer position requires, so the practicality of this recommendation may be limited in many situations.

### **Offer Cash Incentives for Officers Referring New Applicants and Recruits**

Officers who refer successful SDPD applicants are currently rewarded with two days off—an incentive that is not particularly enticing and is potentially counterproductive, given current staffing shortfalls. We recommend that the city support SDPD's proposal to institute a cash incentive for current SDPD officers and civilian staff. SDPD priorities and resources should determine the amounts and requirements. As a starting point for discussion, we recommend considering a \$50 bonus for referring someone who passes the written exam, a \$1,000 bonus for the first referred applicant who joins SDPD, \$3,000 for the second, and \$2,000 for each successfully referred applicant thereafter. Recruiting managers indicated that \$2,000 was a good return on investment. A recent event with \$6,000 of expenses brought in four recruits averaging \$1,500 each, and this was considered an excellent return on investment. The unequal bounties for the first, second, and third referrals are designed to average \$2,000 per referral while strongly encouraging each officer or staff member to aim for two referrals. As SDPD nears its authorized strength, the bounties may be adjusted downward accordingly.

Signing bonuses are generally less effective than investments in advertising and recruiters; however, they can be used to target especially valuable recruits, such as lateral hires, and can attract the public's and the media's attention. If the referral bonus is insufficient to meet

SDPD's recruiting needs, supplementing that plan with targeted signing bonuses should be considered.

## **Improve Efficiency in the Screening Process**

### **Provide an Online Sample Test**

Providing a sample of the written-test subject materials should be among the highest priorities for SDPD. City testing has control over this issue, and SDPD has urged it to develop the sample test and has worked closely with it in that development. Sample tests can improve test scores, and there is some evidence that they are particularly effective for candidates from underrepresented populations. Presently, SDPD applicants enter the written test generally unaware of the topics covered in the test. This may depress the test scores of applicants who do not perform well on some material that they encounter for the first time but that they could learn and apply with practice. The unfamiliarity of the test materials may also dissuade some potential candidates from taking the written test at all. Sample tests are provided at other agencies, and providing them should be an inexpensive exercise. Similarly, a video of the PAT exists but is often nonfunctional on the Web site. This should be a simple correction that provides a great resource for recruiters to refer concerned candidates and for those candidates to see the feasibility of the test.

### **Allow Other Standardized Tests to Substitute for SDPD's Written Test**

Many of the aptitudes evaluated by the written test are also measured by other commonly administered standardized tests—such as ASVAB, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Reasoning Test, and the ACT program. SDPD should examine allowing the substitution of test scores above a certain level to substitute for a passing score on its own written test. For example, 75 percent of San Diego State University students scored at least 980 on the SAT—a score that is at the low end of the scale for this test but that still shows an adequate aptitude for college-level work. Allowing the substitution of test scores could provide a

number of advantages. First, it will remove one formal step in the application process for high-aptitude individuals and therefore encourage them to take the next steps of appearing for the PAT and submitting a formal background questionnaire. Second, allowing the substitution of ASVAB scores will provide SDPD an opportunity to send a clear message to San Diego's large active-duty military workforce that it is seriously interested in them and credits them for accomplishments they have already achieved. ASVAB is a rigorously maintained and vetted test and is widely available. In addition, the military admits members of the armed forces into certain career tracks conditional on achievement of certain ASVAB scores. For example, a military police officer must score at least 95. Additionally, military personnel policies pre-screen recently honorably discharged military applicants for past criminal activities and drug use. Substituting ASVAB scores may also help improve the effective hire rate as well as the overall number of hires.

### **Conduct a Pilot Study to Find an Optimal Pass Point for the Written Test**

The written test screens out 40 percent of applicants at the initial stage of the recruiting process. Given the need for considerably more candidates at later stages of the recruiting process and the fact that academy classes in the past year have had only one academic failure, there is a compelling argument that the pass point is currently set too high. City testing sets the pass point using a method that has been shown to result in pass points that are too high in some cases. Researchers have suggested using the pass point from that method as a starting point but fine-tune the pass point after a few rounds of testing.

Lowering the pass point conservatively—perhaps reducing it by 5 percent—will allow SDPD to ascertain whether the current applicant-screening standard has been too restrictive. We recommend that the pass point be lowered by a few points and that city testing identify for SDPD background and recruiting personnel those applicants whose score places them above the new pass point but below the old pass point. These applicants should then be monitored through the recruiting process and at the academy (without revealing their test-score status to investigators or academy instructors). If these applicants

have a high likelihood of being screened out in the background check, it will be reasonable to conclude that the current pass point saves investigation resources and should remain in place. However, if these applicants clear the background process and the academy at the same rate as those scoring above the old pass point, this is evidence that the current pass point is set too high and unnecessarily screens out many viable candidates. Subject to civil-service regulations, this change in the pass point could be made retroactive to applicants who took the written test prior to the policy change. This would instantly and perhaps substantially provide a new pool of interested SDPD applicants.

In our discussions with stakeholders in the recruiting process, we heard repeatedly that lowering standards is an unacceptable means to increase recruiting. However, there has been only one SDPD academic failure at the academy in 2007. Some others have left because of the physical demands or a realization that police work is not for them, but they are not leaving because they cannot complete the academic coursework. This is evidence that the recruiting process, and perhaps especially the written test, is extremely effective at screening out those at risk for an academic failure. Lowering the pass point might increase the risk that new recruits will fail coursework at the academy, but that is an entirely acceptable risk if it means that more qualified applicants become SDPD police officers.

An alternative, less rigorous process would be to track recruits with written-test scores very close to the pass point, perhaps one or two questions away from failing the written test. Assess whether these officers fare substantially worse than those who pass the test by a large margin. Assess for these recruits whether it would be unfortunate if the pass point had been one point higher and screened them out. If a slightly higher pass point would have screened out quality candidates, likely a pass point that is one point lower would as well.

### **Analyze the Written Test for Problematic Questions**

San Diego's city testing service uses a formal system to identify knowledge, skills, and abilities that police officers need and to develop test questions that measure abilities in those dimensions. Questions undergo careful review during test development. We recommend addi-

tional analyses of test questions using applicant test-score data to identify problematic questions. We have no evidence that such questions exist, but research on test development suggests that such analyses of test scores and test item responses should be a regular practice, especially when fielding a new version of a test. For example, DIF analysis can be used to flag test items that might have racial, ethnic, or other cultural bias. DIF analysis flags test items that, for example, nonwhite test takers are more likely to miss than are white test takers who perform similarly to the nonwhite test takers on other items. Polishing such test items will help SDPD keep as many qualified underrepresented applicants as possible in the screening process. This will, in turn, increase the chances for improving the diversity of recruits.

### **Petition POST to Create a Written Examination Process That Meets San Diego’s Police Testing Needs**

The design of fair and informative tests is a challenging process, a burden that is best shared by a large number of departments. California POST offers such a written test—the POST Entry-Level Test Battery—as a service to member departments. However, delays in scoring the tests are currently too limiting for the test to be of use for SDPD’s testing schedule. We recommend that the department, along with other agencies, petition POST to create a written examination process that meets SDPD’s tight recruiting timeline. A potential disadvantage of using POST is that SDPD would lose its ability to closely interact with test development and management, a benefit that needs to be balanced with the cost of crafting fair and accurate written tests.

## **Strengthen Its Recruiting Workforce and Practices**

### **Establish a Stable Recruiting Budget**

We strongly recommend that the city and the department establish a stable recruiting budget at the beginning of each fiscal year. We support SDPD’s contention that recruiting should be a line item in the department’s budget. This sends a clear signal to all stakeholders that recruiting is an important mission of the department. This will also

reinforce the recruiting team's recent successes and empower team leaders to plan and execute recruiting priorities for the fiscal year.

### **Turn Written-Test Sessions into Marketing Events**

Applicants appearing for the written test are a group of special interest to law-enforcement recruiters: They are sufficiently interested in law-enforcement careers that they are willing to put in the time and effort to take the written test. They also show a particular interest in or awareness of SDPD. However, this does not mean that they have made a commitment to employment with SDPD or to a law-enforcement career at all. Our formal and informal discussions with attendees at one session of the written test indicated that many of them arrived in groups and that some people took the test in solidarity with an interested friend but were waiting for the test results to decide whether they wanted to follow up on police employment. They were considering other departments as well. Several times per month, these events offer SDPD recruiters an excellent opportunity to effectively market SDPD.

RAND researchers took the written examination on two different dates. On one occasion, there was a single officer present. On the other occasion, there were two officers present, but they were not actively "working the line." Instead, the test-date events could be a great opportunity to speak briefly with small groups of applicants about the various opportunities in a department the size of SDPD (e.g., K9 unit, mounted division, child-abuse investigators, SWAT). Arson investigators, in particular, might generate interest in the aftermath of the devastating 2007 fires.

An alternative strategy is to supplement SDPD's current program for the mornings of the monthly PAT. Currently, at the PAT, recruiters work toward building the applicants' commitment to SDPD, in part with speeches designed to inspire applicants to stick through the process because a rewarding career lies ahead. In addition, every candidate is cheered and rooted for through their attempt at completing the PAT. With a sufficient number of recruiters on hand, this can be supplemented with additional interaction so that every applicant has the opportunity to personally interact with at least one SDPD officer, to

receive an acknowledgment of his or her willingness to serve the community, and to be afforded an opportunity to ask questions of SDPD's professional police officers.

Many of those present will not pass the exam or the background process, but, for those who do pass, a good first impression of SDPD will give them less interest in considering other options.

### **Applicants Who Drop Themselves from the Recruiting Process Should Be Redirected to Recruiters**

Currently, applicants who do not complete their application materials or fail to appear for interviews with background investigators are issued constructive waivers, indicating that the application has been formally terminated but that the reason for the termination is not due to an SDPD finding against the applicant. Two RAND researchers took and passed the written test but did not appear for the PAT. They received no contact except a formal notice that they were no longer being considered but that their written test scores would be valid for one year if they would like to reapply. Rather than terminating the application and issuing such notices, we recommend that those applications be referred first to a recruiter for follow-up. While it is possible that an applicant's failure to complete the process indicates that the applicant is unreliable, there may be other explanations. For example, a qualified, highly motivated applicant may have decided to pursue employment with another local law-enforcement agency—our formal and informal discussions with attendees at one session of the written test revealed that just as civilian job seekers submit resumes to multiple firms, some law-enforcement job seekers apply to multiple agencies simultaneously. Since at this stage, SDPD has made no commitment to the applicant, SDPD should not expect commitment from the applicant at this stage. A call or visit from a recruiter may convert some of these applicants to recruits.

### **Establish a Formal Incentive System for Recruiters**

All SDPD officers receive official evaluations from their supervisors. At present, meeting recruiting goals is not part of that evaluation for SDPD recruiters. Benchmarks and targets are essential parts of all suc-

cessful recruiting programs. They clarify the mission for the recruiting team and set concrete goals toward which the team members can strive. In addition, RAND researchers' experiences with SDPD recruiters indicated that some recruiting messages should be clarified and made more consistent across recruiters. The evaluation process will distinguish high performers and reinforce effective practices among the recruiters.

### **Develop a Succession Plan for Subsequent Recruiting Teams**

As we described, the current recruiting team has achieved measurable successes. It is essential that the department sustain this momentum by maintaining the quality of the recruiting team as team members inevitably move onto new assignments. We recommend that the department develop a succession plan for subsequent recruiting teams. The plan should specify the selection criteria for recruiters, formalize a training plan for new members of the team, and set clear evaluation standards.

## **Conclusions**

When SDPD first approached RAND to submit a proposal to provide analysis and recommendations to help SDPD recruit new officers, SDPD had made no progress on increasing the number of recruits. Between that first contact and when RAND researchers began data collection and analysis, SDPD had fielded a new recruiting team that quickly adopted most of the promising practices we cite in the literature. The effect of those initiatives is now being realized in academy-class sizes that are approaching the size needed to eliminate the gap between SDPD's authorized and current strength in the next five years. Improvement was already well on its way before our analysis began. The recommendations we list in this monograph supplement the numerous changes that were initiated in early 2007. Through research and analysis, we identified strategies to expand the potential applicant pool and retain more qualified candidates through the recruiting process. Some of those recommendations are in support of initiatives that SDPD background and recruiting staff have already proposed (bonuses to

SDPD staff for successful recruiting, revamping the recruiting Web site and separating it from the city's site), others build on strategies already attempted (recruiting at selected criminal-justice programs), and others were identified during our analysis (polishing the written test, substitution of the written test, development of recruiter incentives).

By promptly implementing these recommendations, SDPD can have a comparative advantage over other peer departments and other prospective employers that are competing for the same pool of labor. Other departments are grappling with the same issues, and many still find themselves where SDPD was in 2006. A continued focus on meeting recruiting goals and a willingness to consider stretch ideas, such as substituting ASVAB scores for the current written test, can give SDPD a near-term advantage and resolve the problem that started in 2003 and 2004, when only three officers were hired while many more retired.

In policing, achievement of recruiting goals means more than just solving a human-resource problem. It means the adequate provision of public safety to San Diego's residents, workers, businesses, and visitors.

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