

Recruiting Quality Candidates in an Era of Police Reform is Both Possible and Essential

By

Sgt. Jon Greenawalt

Chambersburg Police Department

Chambersburg, Pennsylvania is a Borough of approx. 21,000 people nestled in Franklin County located in the South Central part of the state. The 34 member police department has existed within the municipality since 1818 and it continues to proudly serve a population which is growing in total population and diversity. The events of 2020, which include a global pandemic and civil unrest directed toward law enforcement, should signal a clear mandate to law enforcement leaders that we must be responsive to the citizens we serve while working in the best interest of public safety.

In order to accomplish our mission, two issues become critical for agencies, 1) community policing and 2) recruiting officers who are fitted to a service oriented criteria which will enhance legitimacy of the police in the communities that we serve. Without quality people, the first item is a moot point. So, recruiting should become our initial focus. This begs the question, can we recruit in this era and are there still people who want to wear the badge in this society? The short answer is yes, don't believe the pessimist. But how?

In Chambersburg we believe that we have cracked the code on recruiting in terms of gaining applicants and finding diverse candidates from whom we can select for hire despite anti-law enforcement sentiment and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2020 recruiting cycle, we received 314 applications for testing, 124 of which met diversity targets (women and minorities) that we sought to attract as part of our overall effort. This was accomplished through a multifaceted approach which included building a recruiting team from within the agency,

advertising and social media, seeking diverse candidates, and community relations, which should be the heart of all policing.

Build a Recruiting Team and Develop Relationship with Applicants

In 2018 the department commissioned a recruitment team made up of three officers from within the agency. The officers were trained on recruiting and were then sent off to find recruiting fairs and events to build their contact list. It is not enough to simply compile a list of contacts, recruiters must continue their contacts with potential applicants through an ongoing process which occurs through the testing and hiring process. By developing this rapport with each and every contact they encounter, they build a support base for questions and support that the candidate can rely upon and trust.

Many reading this article might believe that you don't have the time or resources to pull officers off the street for recruiting which is an understandable problem. At CPD we didn't pull officers off the street, we simply offered a job enlargement opportunity to our officers and three of them stepped up to the challenge. Each continued to work their regular shifts and during those shifts, they found time to send emails and make telephone calls to potential applicants that they met in the field, at recruiting events or those who had applied during the period in which we accepted applications.

Advertising and Social Media

If you want candidates to apply for positions within your agency you have to advertise and in doing so must reach a larger audience than your local area. At CPD we used our department website in association with popular social media platforms and job sites such as Indeed and PoliceApp. We published adds in local newspapers and their affiliated websites along

with radio advertisements on multiple stations throughout the region. We also used billboard advertisements which were featured throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia. Much of the advertising that the agency did during the 2020 recruiting push came at very little or zero expense to the agency's budget. We found that many advertising entities were willing to support their community's law enforcement by donating advertising. One example of this was Kegerreis Outdoor Advertising in Chambersburg, PA. Kegerreis came to CPD prior to the recruiting initiative as an act of support for the department and their desire to push out positive messages on our behalf.

Seek Diverse Candidates and They Will Come

If any entity wishes to diversify its staff or agency, they must go out and find those diverse targets that they wish to offer the opportunity. At CPD, we did this via advertising and we clearly stated that we were seeking and encouraging women and minorities to consider applying for a law enforcement career with our department. We placed ads in Diversity Magazine which is marketed to a diverse audience including people of color and women. We also targeted minority applicants on college campuses through ads on their job boards. CPD has also developed a relationship with several diverse churches in the Chambersburg area. We are using these partnerships to enhance recruiting. It is these churches or faith based organizations, many of which are attended by persons of color, which should prove to be a fountain for diverse candidates now and in the future.

The evidence of the positive effect that this had on recruiting diversity was substantial as seen through the 124 diverse targets that applied to the department during this campaign. In most previous recruiting years 124 candidates would have been beyond the upper limit of total candidates who applied for the Chambersburg Police Department.

Community Relations

Perhaps many might not think of community policing as a tool that goes hand in hand with recruiting. At CPD we would submit that any solid recruiting strategy should be built upon solid community relations and the building of partnerships with businesses and community groups who can help a police department build its human capital. This works for the best interest of the agency and the public. The alliances with local churches and Pastors, teaming up with radio stations and media outlets, and local businesses such as Kegerreis Outdoor Advertising are all examples of how CPD utilized our partnerships to assist in the ongoing recruitment of 314 applicants who want to serve the Chambersburg Community. If our strategy on recruiting can work for Chambersburg Police Department, it can work for your agency too. In the era of calls for police reform we cannot afford to fail in our efforts to recruit quality people who can provide quality policing.