



# U.S. Department of **JUSTICE**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Tragic events over the past several years – including officer-involved shootings and attacks on law enforcement officers, and the demonstrations and protests these incidents have spawned – have captured the public’s attention and driven a host of policing issues from the periphery to the center of our public dialogue, including a renewed focus on increasing diversity in the nation’s law enforcement agencies. In December 2014, President Obama announced his Task Force on 21st Century Policing (Task Force). The Task Force brought together a diverse range of stakeholders – including law enforcement leaders, advocates, academics, policymakers, and community members – to explore strategies for strengthening community-police relations, reducing crime, and advancing public safety. In one of its key recommendations for “building trust and legitimacy” in community-police relations, the Task Force focused on the need to ensure law enforcement agencies better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Although the spotlight on these issues may seem new to some, for many – including law enforcement personnel, government officials, and community leaders – this is only one part of a decades-long conversation about how law enforcement and the communities they serve can best work together. Many law enforcement agencies, as well as organizations that work with law enforcement, have devoted considerable time, energy, and attention in their efforts to recruit and retain workforces that reflect the diversity within their jurisdictions. For many years, the Federal government has also worked to address challenges and barriers to diversity in law enforcement.

### **Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement Initiative**

The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission continue to lead robust enforcement, data analysis, and technical assistance efforts to address diversity in law enforcement. Yet these efforts, by themselves, cannot reach all of the more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the country. Indeed, voluntary efforts by law enforcement employers are an equally, if not more, important way to advance diversity and further equal employment opportunity. Toward that end, in December 2015, the Department’s Civil Rights Division and the EEOC launched a new research initiative, “Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement,” both to identify barriers that undermine diversity in law enforcement and to highlight promising practices that help agencies better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. The initiative has focused on barriers and promising practices across three key areas: recruitment, hiring, and retention. In so doing, this initiative has taken a broad examination of various barriers to diversity, while also placing particular emphasis on practices that advance greater racial and gender diversity and that foster the inclusion of the perspectives and experiences of persons of diverse backgrounds in the culture and leadership of law enforcement agencies. This initiative was created to assist law enforcement agencies throughout the country as they strive to build workforces that better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. It is the hope that this effort will especially aid those small and medium-size police departments that recognize the importance of diversity, but may lack the resources to fully explore solutions.

### **Why Diversity in Law Enforcement Matters**

The challenge of recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse workforce is certainly not limited to law enforcement. Throughout the country, in nearly every sector of society, people and

organizations are grappling with this issue. Employers in a variety of industries have engaged in proactive efforts to bolster diversity. Yet this challenge remains particularly urgent in the field of law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies fulfill a fundamental role in our society, and in many communities, individual police officers are often the public face of local government. It therefore is critical that our nation's law enforcement agencies broadly reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

As the Task Force recognized, increased diversity within law enforcement agencies – defined not only in terms of race and gender, but also other characteristics including religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, language ability, background, and experience – serves as a critically important tool to build trust with communities. This finding is bolstered by decades of research confirming that when members of the public believe their law enforcement organizations represent them, understand them, and respond to them – and when communities perceive authorities as fair, legitimate, and accountable – it deepens trust in law enforcement, instills public confidence in government, and supports the integrity of democracy. This trust is essential to defusing tension, to solving crimes, and to creating a system in which residents view law enforcement as fair and just. Victims and witnesses of crime may not approach or engage with law enforcement if they do not perceive such authorities to be responsive to their experiences and concerns. This trust – and the cooperation it facilitates – also enables officers to more effectively and safely perform their jobs.

Research further suggests that increased diversity can make law enforcement agencies more open to reform, more willing to initiate cultural and systemic changes, and more responsive to the residents they serve. Some have pointed to increased diversity as a catalyst for reform, enabling officers and law enforcement leaders alike to become more introspective and reflective about problems in their departments. A more reflective and open-minded culture in an agency can help drive reform across a range of areas, including civilian oversight, community policing, and racial bias. In addition, while greater workforce diversity alone cannot ensure fair and effective policing, a significant – and growing – body of evidence suggests that diversity can have a positive influence on specific activities and practices of law enforcement agencies.

### **Barriers to Diversity**

Despite their efforts, law enforcement agencies of all sizes have not always been successful in recruiting and attracting individuals that reflects the communities they serve. This is likely attributable to a number of factors that are present in the recruiting, hiring, and retention phases.

#### *Recruitment:*

- Strained relations and a lack of trust of law enforcement may deter individuals from underrepresented communities from applying to be officers.
- The reputation or operational practices of law enforcement agencies may dissuade applicants from underrepresented communities from pursuing a career in law enforcement.
- Individuals from underrepresented communities may not be sufficiently aware of career opportunities within law enforcement agencies.

### *Hiring:*

- Law enforcement agencies' reliance on inadequately tailored examinations as part of the screening process may have the unintended consequence of excluding qualified individuals in underrepresented communities from the applicant pool.
- Reliance on certain additional selection criteria and screening processes that disproportionately impact individuals from underrepresented communities can also inhibit agencies' efforts to increase the diversity of their workforces.
- Requirements, such as residency restrictions, may limit certain underrepresented communities' representation in law enforcement agencies.
- Length, complexity, and cost of application processes can serve as a deterrent for applicants.
- Law enforcement agencies may be limited in their ability to modify or adjust hiring and selection criteria.

### *Retention:*

- Individuals may face difficulties adjusting to a law enforcement agency's organizational culture.
- Individuals from underrepresented communities may face difficulties in the promotion process due to a lack of transparency about the process, as well as a scarcity of role models, mentoring relationships, and professional development opportunities.

In identifying policies and practices that have served as barriers to recruiting, hiring, and retaining a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community, this report is not suggesting that law enforcement agencies should necessarily abandon those policies or practices. In fact, some of these policies and practices result from requirements of federal, state, and/or local laws. However, to the extent agencies are trying to increase the diversity of their workforces, they need to recognize that these barriers may impede their ability to do so, and develop strategies to compensate for the barriers' undesired impact.

### **Promising Practices for Increasing Diversity**

By adopting proactive and intentional recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies, law enforcement agencies can address barriers, drive reform, and make progress in ensuring that their workforces better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. The report highlights promising practices – identified through existing online materials, independent research, and interviews – that various law enforcement agencies have found to be particularly effective at increasing their diversity. Given the sheer number of law enforcement agencies in this country, this report does not provide a comprehensive examination of promising practices that have been developed and are being used, but it does provide a number of salient examples focused on the key areas of: (i) recruitment, (ii) hiring, and (iii) retention. Although the practices adopted by law

enforcement agencies vary considerably, this report demonstrates that successful diversity-building efforts by law enforcement agencies share several common themes, including:

- Ensuring that the agency's **organizational culture** is guided by community policing (a strategy of policing that focuses on police building ties and working closely with community members); procedural justice (the idea of fairness in the processes that resolve disputes) and cultural inclusivity (welcoming and including all people).
- **Engaging stakeholders** – both from within and outside the law enforcement agency – to help create a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community.
- **Being willing to re-evaluate employment criteria, standards, and benchmarks** to ensure that they are tailored to the skills needed to perform job functions, and consequently attract, select, and retain the most qualified and desirable sworn officers.

#### *Recruitment:*

- Proactive and targeted community outreach efforts can help encourage people from diverse populations and walks of life to consider careers in law enforcement.
- Building partnerships with educational institutions and providing young people with internship programs creates a robust pipeline of potential applicants while also helping to address historically-negative perceptions or experiences diverse communities have had with law enforcement.
- The effective, innovative use of technology and social media is critical to communicate and connect with all members of the community.

#### *Hiring:*

- Agencies are increasingly adopting a holistic view of what skills and strengths an applicant brings to a law enforcement agency, in part by being willing to reevaluate information revealed during background checks, including previous drug use.
- Law enforcement agencies have expressed a willingness to reconsider selection criteria and written or physical examinations that do not correspond to job-related duties and that disproportionately screen out individuals from underrepresented populations.
- In their efforts to diversify their workforces, law enforcement agencies have streamlined and made more transparent their hiring and selection procedures. Some agencies have offered assistance and preparation materials to help applicants prepare for examinations.
- Law enforcement agencies have involved community members in the hiring process as a way to develop workforces that reflects the diversity of their communities.

### *Retention:*

- Mentorship programs and leadership training are critical to providing new officers – particularly those from underrepresented populations – with the support, guidance, and resources they need to succeed on the job, enjoy their careers, and earn promotions.
- Community partnerships and stakeholder engagement can help retain officers of color and women by better understanding the unique challenges they face in the profession.
- Incentives – including providing temporary housing, allowing officers to work towards college credit while on the job, and providing financial bonuses for language skills – can help retain officers with diverse experiences and backgrounds.

### **Key Conclusions**

Law enforcement agencies that are committed to increasing the diversity of their workforces and ensuring that the demographic makeup of their sworn officers reflect the diversity of the communities they serve face a plethora of challenges. These challenges, which manifest themselves at every stage of the recruitment, selection, and retention processes, are daunting, but – as the experiences of the law enforcement agencies highlighted in this report make clear – they are far from insurmountable. In fact, agencies that have undertaken this effort have found that increased diversity brings a range of benefits that can be seen both within their workforces as well as in their relations with the communities they serve. It is the hope that this report's discussion of barriers that inhibit diversity and the promising practices that have been adopted and are being used in jurisdictions all across the country provide a useful resource for law enforcement agencies, particularly those that may not have the internal resources to undertake this type of review themselves.

At the same time, the work done for the Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement initiative has revealed a number of unanswered questions and areas for future research and review. Specifically:

- More work needs to be done to **understand the impact of increased workforce diversity on the enforcement activities** of law enforcement agencies.
- **Additional empirical research is needed** to better understand the long-term impacts of the promising practices highlighted in this report.
- Further research could **analyze how to further institutionalize these promising practices** within departments so that they can withstand changes in leadership and personnel.
- When government stakeholders and policymakers consider laws and regulations that impact selection procedures and criteria for law enforcement agencies, **the impacts on the agencies' ability to hire officers that reflect the diversity of their communities** should be taken into account.

- Further research is needed to better understand how law enforcement agencies can **successfully retain and foster career advancement of officers** from underrepresented populations.

This report does not represent the end of the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division and the EEOC's work around these important issues. The Federal government remains committed to partnering with law enforcement agencies from all across the country to assist them in their efforts to better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.