



# The Next Jail Epidemic:

# STAFFING

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**As jails emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges in recruitment, retention, and retirements will continue to place additional burdens on jails.** This article reviews the recent literature in corrections and law enforcement to identify strategies to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention. More information on the ideas and strategies discussed here are identified throughout the article and in the works cited.

Some of this guidance is cutting edge. However, most of it is what we already know: Hiring and retention are not haphazard or incidental outcomes of daily work, but rather require planning, resourcing, commitment, and assessment. We also know that addressing the internal culture of the jail goes hand in hand with retaining its employees. Failure to identify and tackle why employees seek other employment indicates that jails are only treading water at best.

## Advancing the Jail's Staffing Agenda

The responsibility of the jail's leadership is to assure that their facility is adequately staffed with qualified and trained employees. Creating a workplace where employees want to work—and encourage others to join them—is integral to

### Identify the Barriers to Hiring

The literature identifies these as starting points to understanding why candidates don't apply, are unsuccessful during the process, or drop out:

- Absence of diversity in the workplace.
- Affordable housing in safe locations.
- Agency's reputation.
- Comparative salary/benefits.
- Cost of living; livability of wage.
- Generationally irrelevant; unattractiveness of paramilitary structure.
- Image of working in jails.
- Lack of enthusiasm; ambivalence by the agency toward applicants.
- Lack of priority of family and work/life balance.
- Shift work.
- Time between application and hiring decision.
- Too much hiring bureaucracy; multiple steps in the process; paper driven.
- Unclear benefits to the individual to take the job (e.g., training, opportunities, promotions).
- Unclear expectations during the process; uncertain of qualifications and disqualifiers.
- Vague job duties.

recruitment and retention. This hard work requires ongoing collaborations that are guided by accurate problem-identification, the implementation of plans of action, and an engagement with the human resources entity serving the jail—along with the meaningful involvement of employees, the community, and stakeholders.

If recruitment and retention are issues for your jail, then consider sharing this article with decision-makers, your funding authority, and jail staff to promote further conversations, prioritization, and clarification. These ideas are intended to initiate thoughtful discussions, not to overwhelm readers. It is unacceptable for jail leaders *to do nothing*. By creating an inclusive strategic-planning process or action planning, jail leaders will be provided with a way to effectively staff their jails (McC Campbell, 2017).

The function of our jails in the criminal justice system must continually be advanced in order to assure that needed resources are allocated to meet the organization's mission, vision, and values. Jails urgently need to learn to create political capital because strategies to focus on recruitment, hiring, and retention need to involve local political leaders and gain the support of funders.

### Positioning Your Agency for Success

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the median salary for correctional officers in the United States is \$45,300, which is 12% less than the median salary for firefighters and 44% less than the median salary for police officers/detectives (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). This gap is not universally true across the country, and some corrections organizations have achieved pay parity with law enforcement. The salary gap, however, is a tangible barrier to recruitment and retention.

Additionally, some jails within sheriff's offices serve as a recruitment pool for their road patrols,

which further destabilizes jail staffing and creates a perception of a higher value on law enforcement careers (Stinchcomb, 2009). Individuals who wish to be patrol officers should not be discouraged from doing so; but having a policy that requires these individuals to work first in the jail devalues corrections work.

Recognizing it is never a good time to request more funds, what other actions can jail leaders take to position their agency to meet the future, maintain safety, and retain employees?

As Stephen Covey notes: "If we keep doing what we're doing, we're going to keep getting what we're getting." The following strategies can assist the jail's leadership with their staffing issues. However, understand that they require work as well as the development of internal and external collaborations.

**Define/update the organization's mission, vision, and values and align operations.** An up-to-date statement of agency mission, vision, and values can build the foundation for the facility's hiring and retention. These are developed with staff, stakeholders, and community input, then widely shared. Without clear mission, vision, and values, how can hiring and retention be sufficiently defined?

These underlying pillars of the organization define the skills, knowledge, abilities (SKAs), and traits for new employees and also guide existing employees in their daily work (Copple, 2017; McC Campbell, 2016).

**Develop a strategic plan for recruitment.** With a definitive and realistic plan, haphazard and ineffective results occur. The issues to be considered include but are not limited to:

- Align recruitment and hiring with the organization's mission, vision, and values.



- Identify the skills, knowledge and abilities (SKAs) needed for all personnel functions and update job descriptions. Revise recruitment materials to reflect needed SKAs.
- Collect and analyze workforce and demographic data.
- Consider conducting a root-cause analysis to identify recruitment challenges.
- Put someone in charge of recruitment (and retention) and hold them accountable.
- Review data from employee-staying interviews, job satisfaction surveys, town halls, and exit interviews.
- Assure staffing analyses are current.
- Identify your agency's barriers to effective hiring.
- Brand or rebrand the organization.
- Establish or improve partnerships with the community and businesses, including a focus on affordable housing.
- Involve unions or other labor representatives.
- Examine training—pre-service, in-service, and CTO/FTO/JTO. Training for the 21st, not 20th century is demanded.
- Focus on corrections as both a profession and a career.
- Develop realistic job previews for candidates.
- Consider bonuses (financial and other) for employees who refer qualified applicants who are hired/complete training/complete probationary year.
- Craft your recruitment message to be clear, generationally relevant, and honest.
- Focus on the agency's diversity; examine employment data for minorities, women, and the LGBTQ community.
- Consider generational relevance of operations, training, and supervision.
- Study civilianizing positions or contracting for discreet functions.
- Review options for part-time workers or consider rehiring retired employees.
- Assess the shift schedule, compress work schedules, and examine options.
- Consider a cadet program, internships, and partnerships with technical or career schools, colleges, and universities.
- Identify and assess the "competition."
- Assure recruiters represent the vision, values, and diversity of agency; train them.
- Involve all employees in reviewing recruitment initiatives and developing plans.
- Decide what might work for your jail and implement an action plan with due dates and outcome benchmarks.

#### **Get a grip on the hiring process.**

Jails cannot afford to give away the responsibility, sense of urgency, and accountability for hiring their agency's staff. If working with others, within the organization, or in another part of the organization has not given the needed results—immediately, but respectfully, change that relationship.

- Accept responsibility for the jail's hiring process.
- Streamline "anachronistic" hiring processes. If the jail's hiring protocols haven't been examined or updated recently, now is the time (e.g., minimum requirements, criminal activity/drug use, disqualifiers).
- Hire candidates who share the values and vision of the community and the jail (e.g., integrity, service orientation, empathy, communication and human relations skills, self-control, team orientation, problem-solving skills).
- Scrutinize the validity of written testing, interviews, and physical fitness standards.

#### **Business Partnerships**

When implementing the hiring (and retention) plan, consider partners in the community, including other criminal justice stakeholders. Which businesses can help? And how?

Once you target these businesses, then:

- Make contact.
- Sell the initiative.
- Agree on the partnership purpose.
- Structure the partnership.
- Involve them in problem-solving and a plan of action.
- Define success.
- Assess the effectiveness of the partnership.

For more information, including how to reach out to a business, visit the Problem-Oriented Policing Center at Arizona State University at <https://popcenter.asu.edu>.

- Align the budget to hiring and recruitment plans.
- Build a strong partnership with human resources.
- Tell the story of the jail to the community.
- Create a sense of urgency.
- Document the costs of overtime and the impact of mandatory overtime on retention.
- Significantly shorten the time from application to hire date.
- Keep the hiring process open; schedule more regular testing.
- Sequence the steps in the hiring process for more efficiency and respect for applicants' time.
- Obtain resources to fast track polygraph examinations (or similar screenings) and medical and mental health screenings.

## Library Resources and Guidance for Problem Analysis and Developing Plans of Action

### Recruitment and Retention Best Practices

California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (2006, April)  
<http://annex.ipacweb.org>

**What's there?** Developing a recruitment strategic plan, p. 97

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### *Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century, Forum Proceedings*

James E. Copple (2017)  
Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
<https://cops.usdoj.gov>

**What's there?** Action steps for recruiting female law enforcement officers, p. 14; Action steps for recruiting LGBTQ law enforcement officers, p. 16; Action steps for recruiting millennial candidates, p. 17; Action steps for improving the image of police for recruitment (e.g., branding and rebranding the agency), p. 19.

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### **"Core Competencies and Jail Leadership: Vision and Mission"**

Susan W. McCampbell, (2016, March / April)  
*American Jails*, 29(1), 37–44  
[www.cipp.org](http://www.cipp.org)

**What's there?** Guidance for developing or updating the jail's mission, vision, and value statements.

### *Recruiting and Retaining Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement*

National Center for Women and Policing (2000)  
[www.ncjrs.gov](http://www.ncjrs.gov)

**What's there?** Checklist for recruiting quality candidates, p. 58; Checklist for removing obstacles in the selection process, p. 79; Checklist for implementing family-friendly policies, p. 116; Checklist for preventing sexual and gender harassment, discrimination, and retaliation, p. 145. (Other checklists are available in the document.)

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### *The Future is Now: Recruiting, Retaining and Developing the 21st Century Jail Workforce*

Jeanne B. Stinchcomb, Susan W. McCampbell, and Leslie Leip, (2009)  
Center for Innovative Public Policies, Inc.  
<http://www.cipp.org/futureisnow.html>

**What's there?** Strategic Recruitment Planning Checklist, p. 43; Strategic Retention Planning Checklist, p. 88

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For a complete listing of all recruitment, hiring, and retention resources, send a request to [susanmccampbell@cipp.org](mailto:susanmccampbell@cipp.org).

### *Resource Guide for Newly Appointed Warden, Second Edition*

Jeanne B. Stinchcomb and Susan W. McCampbell (2017)  
U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections  
<http://www.cipp.org>

**What's there?** Shaping Organizational Culture "To Do" Checklist, p. 64; Human Resources "To Do" Checklist, p. 85

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### *Law Enforcement Best Practices: Lessons Learned from the Field*

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (2019)  
<https://cops.usdoj.gov>

**What's there?** Checklist to implement improvements to recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention, p. 107. (Other checklists included for internal affairs, early intervention systems, first line supervisors, de-escalation, and crisis intervention.)

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### *Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement*

U.S. Department of Justice and the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, (2016, October)  
[www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov)

**What's there?** Promising Practices for Increasing Diversity, pp. 25–35

- Resource background investigators who are trained and guided by policy.
- Implement technology solutions (e.g., go paperless).
- Mentor and regularly communicate with applicants to keep them involved with the agency.
- Focus on quality hires, not quantity.
- Assign liaisons to the community.
- Use social media; update the agency's website.
- Consider third-party vendors for all or some of the hiring and background investigation processes.
- Periodically evaluate the hiring outcomes to align with action plans; make mid-course corrections as needed.

**Continuously improve the workplace.** If jails do not recognize and work to address workplace issues, hiring will continue to be a revolving door. This may be the most challenging and the most needed work.

- Assure that the jail's internal culture continually evolves to align with the jail's mission, vision, and values, and the promises made to employees.
- Make internal and external transparency a priority.
- Develop operational performance measures linked to mission, vision, and values; analyze and collect data; hold employees accountable for the outcomes.
- Provide training, leadership development opportunities, and tuition reimbursement.
- Educate employees on the different generations in the workplace and how to get the best from each of them.
- Listen to employees.
- Assure supervisors are trained before they assume their new responsibilities.

- Focus on the needs of employees (such as on-site childcare and fitness facilities) and address issues raised in employee surveys.
- Assure that employees are involved in and informed about the agency's decision-making.
- Make internal communications a high priority.
- Evaluate employee job performance using job-valid criteria.
- Develop and implement a retention plan.
- Assure that the employee-grievance process and the external and internal complaint procedures are robust and transparent.
- Examine implicit bias in all aspects of agency operations and training.
- Provide clear, merit-based, and objective pathways to promotion.
- Consider establishing an employee-mentoring program, working collaboratively with peers, job shadowing, rotating job assignments, and cross-training.
- Recognize exceptional work.
- Implement an employee-recognition program based on what's important to employees.
- Consider establishing a citizen's advisory board to link the jail to the community and provide meaningful paths to gather input from stakeholders.

### Conclusion

Jail leaders now have more information and resources about how to improve or enhance recruitment, hiring, and retention. Recognizing there are always emergencies to divert the attention away from personnel management, failing to do so is failing to fulfill leadership responsibilities. ■

### Meaningful Community Involvement

Jail leaders often cite the community's lack of understanding about the roles and responsibilities of jails as a barrier to obtaining resources and community respect. To address this, consider the positive results of increased community involvement with the jail—more than just the vital roles of volunteers. Ideas include:

- Citizen advisory board, with specific roles and collaboration, bylaws, and responsibilities.
- Citizen academy (or expansion of an existing law enforcement program to include the jail).
- Orientation and community meetings to create ambassadors/advocates for jail needs, budget, staffing, and programming.
- Recruitment assistance; involvement in action plans enhancing recruitment and retention.
- Assistance with structured interviews of potential candidates.
- Participation in complaint reviews or oversight.
- Outreach to businesses.

Increasing meaningful involvement of the community requires a commitment of time and staff from the jail. For example, an advisory board needs bylaws so that everyone involved knows the expectations and responsibilities, as well as meeting dates, agendas, and initiatives.

Recent public demands for more accountability in the justice system are focused on more oversight and less advising. Jails should consider how to increase external (and internal) transparency to address these valid community concerns.



Transparency captures the degree to which decisions are being made in a visible fashion; the extent operations are subject to review and scrutiny by outsiders; and the extent the choices of decision makers are readily evident.

—Joseph A. Schafer

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