Understanding the Police Hiring Process:
Recommendations for Data Collection and Analysis

Working Paper #2011-7
July, 2011

Michelle Comeau
Center for Public Safety Initiatives
Rochester Institute of Technology
mjc439@rit.edu

John Klofas, Ph.D.
Center for Public Safety Initiatives
Rochester Institute of Technology
john.klofas@rit.edu
585-475-2423

Understanding the Police Hiring Processes:
Recommendations for Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide useful information to agencies and communities interested in understanding their police hiring process. Sound analysis of the hiring process can 1) contribute to meeting hiring goals, 2) help understand the outcomes of the process, 3) help change those outcomes in planned ways and 4) provide information to help understand and improve officer performance later on.

When cities and towns keep track of their hiring process it also makes it possible for them to make comparisons over time and across communities. This will help them further understand hiring issues as they are, and to consider what practices may be most effective.

The recommendations here are offered only as helpful suggestions. They are not intended as an exhaustive or complete list of data collection information. They are also not intended as a list of either requirements or standards in this area. Bear in mind also that the recommendations here are intended to assist in analysis of the hiring process, not in making hiring decisions in individual cases. These two processes should be kept separate since they involve very different uses of information.

This paper is based on an analysis of the hiring process in the Rochester Police Department completed in 2011. For that we examined the processes through which approximately 1500 applications led to the hiring of a total of 334 police officers, or 2.3% of the applicants. The analysis of this process is summarized in working papers available through the Center for Public Safety Initiatives at www.rit.edu/cpsi .

This paper follows the stages of the police hiring process and recommends information which should be collected. Processes differ somewhat across communities, so to be most useful, information collection and analysis must be tailored to local circumstances.   This paper is based on a process involving the following steps.

1. Written Application
2. Written Test (this may be a local test or state civil service exam)
3. Physical fitness/agility test
4. Medical exam
5. Psychological exam and psychological interview
6. Background check, criminal history, drug test
7. Polygraph
8. Personal Interview
9. Recommendation for hiring
10. Offer of employment

There are three general types of information which should be kept.

1. **Hiring Program Information.** Important information should be kept on the practices used to select candidates for each academy class. At the minimum, this should be kept in a clearly labeled computerized word processing file with appropriate attachments, and it should be updated throughout the process.

   a. Detailed information should be kept about the job advertising/ recruiting process. This should include copies of all employment advertisements and notices, and information on when and where information was distributed. Information on all recruitment efforts should be kept including when and where these efforts occurred and what they involved- outreach, presentations, signup tables, question sessions, when and where information and applications were made available, copies of webpages, etc. Information on recruiting outcomes such as the number of brochures or applications distributed should also be recorded.

   b. Information should also be kept regarding the dates, times and locations of all steps in the process. These include the dates in which the application process was opened and closed, whether and when information sessions for applicants were held, and when and where any pre-testing study, review, or work-out sessions were held. And, of course, when and where tests were given and when and where each subsequent step in the process occurred should be noted.

   c. Results of important decisions which may change over time should also be included. These include decisions about what is considered a passing score on tests or any other cut-offs among passing scores which effect hiring. This may include differences on entrance test scores or such things as different physical exercise requirements by gender.

2. **Basic Information on all Applicants.** In addition to individual files kept on candidates important information should be kept in a clearly labeled computerized data base file, such as an EXCEL file.

The following information should be kept for all people who apply:

Date of application
Name
Address
Telephone and Email   (good contact information will be important for later analyses)
Date of Birth
Sex
Race
Education level

Are minimal application requirements met (yes/no)? If not, why not (for example, under minimum age)

You should consider keeping other information which may be important to you. This should meet any additional needs you may have but may include such things as;

Military History
Employment History
Language skills
Other special skills

The information above will allow you to describe the characteristics of applicants. The overall number of applicants and their characteristics can also be seen as products of the police recruitment process. This information therefore also allows you to assess how well recruitment goals are met and it will help you define recruitment goals for the future. This information will be valuable in assessing issues of diversity among applicants and the impact of the hiring process of applicants from diverse backgrounds. Comparisons with census data and other local information will also allow you to examine how well your applicant pool reflects the characteristics of the community.

Please Note: All information which can be used to identify individuals should be collected and maintained under the strictest standards of confidentiality and should not be used for purposes outside the hiring process, planning and research. Planning and research documents should only include summary information which does not permit identification of individuals.

3. **Step by Step Information about Candidates in the Hiring Process.** At the minimum, this should be kept as part of the data base file noted above. This will provide a single data file for all candidates regardless of the stage at which they were eliminated from further processing.   Information for each step taken by each candidate should be maintained. At each step the file can be sorted so that the records of candidates continuing on can be kept together and separated from the records of candidates who do not move forward.

   a. Make sure you record all relevant **dates**. These will help you examine the length of the process and the time between steps. This will help you understand whether you lose candidates because of the length of the process and the competition with other sources of employment.

   b. You should also keep a record if a candidate **drops out or is a no-show**. This will allow you to consider the three ways the hiring process can end for an applicant: dropping out (or no show), failing an exam, or discretionary removal by the department.

c. Record if and why an application does not meet **minimal hiring requirements** such as age. This can help direct recruitment efforts.

d. Record whether an applicant participated in any **pre-employment study or review programs** or fitness training programs. This may help understand the value of these efforts in helping people prepare for the process.

e. Record whether the applicant shows up to take the **employment exam**. Many people do not. Analysis of this may help improve the efficiency of recruiting. It may help you in providing accurate and useful information to applicants and finding ways to encourage some applicants to follow through.

f. Record the scores on **employment tests** as well as the major components of the tests. This will help analyze the impact of the test. It will provide information on where some applicants are successful and where others are not. It can also provide information that may be used to help other applicants prepare for future exams.

g. Record completion levels for each element of the **physical fitness/ agility test**. This should include things like the number of push-ups and sit-ups completed in the required time and the time it took to complete any running exercise. These records will allow you to examine whether expectations are problematic for too many otherwise qualified candidates. They will also allow you to consider individual retests if some reasonable level (such as 90% of required) is achieved. And, it will allow you to help future candidates focus on identified potential problem areas.

h. Almost all applicants who pass the fitness test are likely to pass a basic **medical exam**. Even with that understood, recording basic medical indicators will allow you to understand the overall health of applicants and of subgroups within the pool.

i. It is important to record the results of **psychological examinations and interviews** so that you can track the extent to which these steps exclude candidates from the pool as a whole and from subgroups.

j. **Background checks** will include a variety of procedures including credit checks, neighbor interviews, drug tests, and criminal history checks. Results of each procedure should be recorded so that their impact on the pool and subgroups can be understood and addressed if necessary. For example, agencies may wish to consider that some credit problems may differ according to income history.

k. In some cases, minor and non-recent histories of drug use may not preclude hiring. However, some candidates may be unaware of that policy and may

therefore be hesitant about making such admissions. If **polygraph exams** are used, recording the content areas where untruthfulness is detected may help understand whether making such policies clear to applicants will help retain otherwise qualified candidates.

l. **Personal interviews** necessarily afford department representatives broad discretion in the hiring process. Recording the reason behind discretionary decisions can help understand the issues that are important and their effects on eliminating applicants from the overall pool and subgroups within that pool.

m. Tracking who is **recommended for hiring**, who is given an **offer of employment** and who **accepts or rejects that offer** is important. Documenting these decisions will allow departments to understand any patterns that may exist in recommendations and in applicants' decisions to accept employment.

Understanding the timing and decisions made at each step in the hiring process can help departments understand and, if necessary, improve the hiring process.

Analysis of the Hiring Process Information

A basic summary of the hiring process involves knowing the number of applicants and the percentage of applicants passing at each step. The chart below illustrates one way to organize that information so that it can be useful in understanding the process. This chart, or a similar one, should be completed for the total pool of applicants and for any subgroup you wish to study. This will allow you to make comparisons. For example you can compare the results for male and female applicants at each step and for the complete process. Please contact us if you would like a version of this chart in excel so that you can edit it to meet your needs and/or use it with your own data (john.klofas@rit.edu).

	Step by Step Results of Hiring Process						
a.	Note date of employment exam here to identify the specific hiring process._____						
b.	Specify if this table applies to total or list sub group here.						
c.	Total number of applications accepted for group noted above _____	Number of Applicants eligible for this step	Number of no shows at this step	Percent of Eligible who are no shows	Number approved for next step	Percent approved for next step	Percent not approved for next step
1	Meets Application Requirements					%	%
2	Written Test			%		%	%
3	Physical Fitness/Agility Test			%		%	%
4	Medical Exam			%		%	%
5	Psychological Exam			%		%	%
6	Background, Criminal history, Drug test			%		%	%
7	Polygraph Exam			%		%	%
8	Personal Interview			%		%	%
9	Candidate Recommended for Hiring					%	%
				number of offers made	number of offers accepted	% of offers accepted	% of offers not accepted
10	Offer of Employment Made					%	%
			Total applied	Total Hired	Percent Hired		
	Results Summary (for total process)						

Additional analyses which you may wish to consider are noted in the previous section. If you choose to conduct more detailed analyses you may want to consider forming a partnership with a local college or university.

Conclusion

The selection of police officers is an important and expensive process. It has implications for the quality of policing and for police/community relations which last for generations. With contemporary concerns over community representation as well as with the availability of desktop technology for data collection and analysis, departments need hiring processes which are as rational and justifiable as possible.

The data collection approach and analyses described here will allow agencies to identify and understand the impact of all hiring stages on the applicant pool. It will provide information on when and how candidates are eliminated and whether those effects are even across different

categories of applicants. Those analyses can then provide a foundation for more focused and detailed examinations of hiring practices. In our work these have included the tracking of officer diversity, as well as interviews to consider the hiring experience from the perspective of candidates who have dropped out or been removed from the process. All of these can help improve the police selection process.

If you would like to make any comments on this material or you would like to add material to this working paper please contact Dr. John Klofas through email at john.klofas@rit.edu .