



Executive Session Papers

Human Rights Commissions and Criminal Justice

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Increasing Diversity in Police Departments: Strategies and Tools for Human Rights Commissions and Others

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This paper seeks to help Human Rights and Human Relations Commissions across the United States work with police officials and others to increase race and gender diversity among law enforcement personnel in their jurisdictions. The paper draws on experience of police and human rights agencies from three jurisdictions: Rhode Island, Kentucky, and Atlanta, Georgia. It describes innovative recruitment strategies and policies that should prove useful in provoking further innovation in other cities and states.

Diversity is particularly important in law enforcement. Police depend on the support and assistance of the public, yet members of racial and ethnic minorities tend to view police less favorably than their white counterparts. Because of the visibility of police officers in American communities, a diverse agency publicly displays its commitment to equal treatment in law enforcement. Diversity in the ranks can also help make police personnel more sensitive to the use of racially or ethnically offensive language in casual as well as public conversations. These are advantages even in communities where residents are

overwhelmingly of a single race or ethnicity. Diversity matters everywhere.

Not Just a Local Issue

With the exception of the work of comparatively small numbers of federal law enforcement officers and state police, policing in America is the responsibility of cities and counties. State officials typically leave the recruiting and hiring decisions of police departments to localities. But state officials can and should be aware of statewide police force diversity, and should provide support for local departments to improve recruiting techniques and hiring practices.

Why? State officials have a wider view from which to objectively assess the statewide patterns of diversity in law enforcement, to note large differences between adjoining towns, and to measure citizen satisfaction with police practices relating to diversity. Without interfering in local police departments' operations, states can offer various incentives such as grants and training opportunities to departments seeking to diversify.

Rhode Island, for example, is in the planning stages of creating a statewide police academy and a statewide pool of trainees. Currently, the state operates three separate academies: a state police academy, a Providence-only academy, and a municipal academy for local departments other than Providence. The Providence academy attracts a diverse pool of trainees, but if, for example, 30 recruits successfully attend the Providence academy and only 10 are hired, there has been no way, until now, for other jurisdictions to hire the other 20 recruits. Under the new plan, there will be one facility, one training curriculum, and one pool of recruits to draw from statewide. This is a good example of how state initiative can improve local access to a more diverse pool of candidates while also saving costs.

Assessing Diversity: Questions to Ask

Police force diversity is not something achieved without firm commitments from the police chief and top police administrators to make it a priority. Outsiders such as human rights commissioners, district attorneys, and city officials can provide valuable support to encourage a police department to undertake efforts to achieve and maintain diversity, but this support is no substitute for leadership at the top.

To probe whether a police department is doing all it can to promote diversity, consider asking some of the following questions:

- Does the department recruit out of state? Due to differing demographics and job markets, where you go matters, and often strategically recruiting outside of

one's city or state can lead to a more diverse pool of applicants.

- Does the department critically evaluate the reasons that minority and female applicants are not hired? Such a review can reveal factors, such as poor credit ratings, failure to meet certain physical fitness standards, or prior drug usage, that disproportionately eliminate minority or female candidates.
- Has the department compared its standards, such as those for psychometric exams or physical fitness requirements, to those of other departments across the state? Some departments have found that they are losing diversity in their candidates because of standards that are higher than those that prevail in their state.
- Does the department have a long-term strategy for mentoring minority youth and encouraging them to consider law enforcement careers? Partnering with other agencies can be an effective way to approach outreach and mentoring.

If the answers to these queries indicate room for some more innovative recruitment strategies, consider suggesting some of the approaches taken by other police departments.

A Menu of Creative Strategies for Diversity

The following array of recruitment strategies draws heavily on the experience of one police chief, Richard Pennington, in Atlanta, Georgia, who has made improved officer diversity a high priority. The list also

contains approaches uncovered by our survey of Rhode Island police agencies. The strategies fall under four broad categories:

- 1. Partnerships and Collaborations**
- 2. Outreach**
- 3. Hiring Reform**
- 4. Long-term Recruitment Efforts**

1. Partnerships and Collaborations

- **Expanded Partnership with a Workforce Development Agency:** Every locality has some form of workforce development agency that administers employment and training programs mandated under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. In Atlanta, that agency supports the police department's recruiting efforts in several standard ways, such as advertising vacant positions and test dates, posting job openings and minimum requirements on its web site, and providing drug testing for applicants, but the Atlanta Workforce Development Agency goes further by performing the following functions:
 - Providing a personal trainer to aid applicants in passing the department's physical abilities test;
 - Assisting new out of state employees in accessing services in order to facilitate a smooth transition; and
 - Helping to reach out to minority youth in Atlanta and to publicize youth employment opportunities with the APD.

- **Warwick, Rhode Island Police Partnership with Academic Institutions:** The Warwick Police Department partners with graduate student researchers from a local university to conduct research and analysis on the problem of recruitment and retention of minority police officers. Currently, researchers are in the process of conducting surveys of students of color at Rhode Island colleges and universities. These surveys aim to assess student attitudes towards police and to evaluate why those students may or may not be interested in a career as a police officer. According to the Warwick Police Department Recruitment plan, researchers will also review current recruitment policies, interview police recruiters, and compile a report of findings and recommended strategies.
- **Providence, Rhode Island Police and Community Collaboration:** The Providence Police Department, already the most diverse in the state, launched a new recruitment campaign in early 2006 focused on attracting women and minority candidates. The drive consisted of neighborhood-based study halls with mentors and coaches helping potential candidates to prepare for the police exam. The study halls were organized in conjunction with the Omni Development Corporation and the Urban League of Rhode Island and included instruction in physical fitness, grammar, arithmetic, reading comprehension, test taking and incident report writing. In addition the drive utilized media and public outreach

targeted to minority communities. All classes were free and open to all applicants.

- **Contact with Military Bases:** The Atlanta Police Department maintains contact with all major U.S. military bases in order to advertise job opportunities.

- Mass Media Advertising through local Spanish-language and Latino community media outlets (TV, radio and newspapers);
- Attendance at job fairs sponsored by the Latin American Association; and
- Placing posters and flyers inside of restaurants in the local Latino community.

2. Outreach

- **Recruitment Road Trips:** The Atlanta Police Department (APD) chooses where it conducts out-of-town recruiting based on an analysis of demographics, unemployment rates and recent layoffs of police officers. Prior to each trip advertisements are placed in minority newspapers and on radio stations. While on the road, the APD rents out a hotel conference room where it provides information as well as conducts tests and interviews with potential recruits. Cities visited by APD recruiters include: Cleveland OH; Saint Paul/Minneapolis, MN; Birmingham/Montgomery, AL; Chattanooga, TN; Jackson, MS; Milwaukee, WI; Chicago, IL; Suffolk County/Buffalo/Rochester, NY; St. Louis, MO; Macon/Columbus/Savannah, GA; Columbia/Charleston, SC; New York, NY; Charlottesville, WV; Philadelphia, PA; Detroit, MI; Pittsburgh, PA and San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- **Targeted Recruiting to Latino Community:** The APD Recruitment Unit reaches out to Atlanta's rapidly growing Latino community through the following tactics:

- **Aggressive Advertising:** For Atlanta's police force, this includes: placement of job announcements in national trade publications, military trade publications, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* and numerous other state newspapers, gay and lesbian publications, various Hispanic publications, and minority student job publications; internet advertising; a streaming video on the Atlanta Police Department website; local radio station ads; and postings at sports arenas, college and university employment centers and local church fairs.

3. Hiring Reform

- **Case by Case Review of Driving Violations and Bad Credit of Applicants:** The APD noticed that many young applicants were ineligible for employment because of past driving violations or poor credit. In many cases, these past problems were not related to the applicant's potential to be a police officer. Consequently, the department has begun to scrutinize these cases more carefully and is accepting those applicants whose credit and driving violations are minor and reparable.

In addition, APD recruiters go to high schools to talk with youth about the importance of maintaining good credit and clean criminal records and the possible negative effects these can have on future employment opportunities, whether in law enforcement or elsewhere.

- **Making the Grade - Evaluating Performance Requirements:** The APD made changes to its minimum passing requirements for recruits after it found that one requirement disproportionately affected black candidates while others disproportionately affected women candidates. When Chief Pennington learned that over two years, roughly 1,000 applicants, most of whom were minority, failed to pass the recruiting requirements he asked why. Many, it turned out, were eliminated because of scores on the APD psychometric test. Chief Pennington learned that the Atlanta Police Department was using a minimum passing score of 80, while the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (P.O.S.T. Council) set the state passing score at 70.¹ After lowering the passing score to 75, still higher than the statewide average, the department invited all minority applicants to reapply. The result was that many more passed the minimum requirements and qualified as recruits. Similarly, when Chief Pennington asked for data on the reasons why women candidates were being eliminated as recruits, he

learned that many could not pass the standing jump test, whereby candidates must jump a minimum of 16 inches from a standing position. With women recruits going through physical conditioning at the Academy, this requirement seemed unnecessary, and the minimum passing height was reduced to 12 inches. Previously, when Pennington was Chief of the New Orleans Police Department, he discovered that women candidates had difficulty handling the Department's standard issue .40-caliber pistols. The Department switched to a type of pistol that fit a smaller hand, giving candidates a choice of which firearm to use. In both Atlanta and New Orleans, these changes resulted in increased women candidates, broadening the pool of potential women officers.

4. Long Term Recruiting Efforts

- **Youth Outreach and Employment:** With assistance from the Atlanta Workforce Development Agency (AWDA), the APD recruits minority high school students for summer employment. In the summer of 2005, 14 tenth and eleventh grade students worked 20 hours per week at \$8-10 per hour in various capacities. Chief Pennington expects to add 20 more students in the summer of 2006. These students are recruited both by the AWDA and members of the Police Athletic League.
- **The Police Athletic League:** This program provides athletic activities for youth from low-income communities of color in Atlanta.

¹ P.O.S.T. administers the regulatory process, sets the standards for training and certification, and provides essential technical assistance to the law enforcement community in Georgia.

Intramural sports such as golf, football and baseball are supervised by members of the Atlanta Police Department. According to Chief Pennington, this allows Atlanta youth to get to know police officers in a positive context. In addition, it provides the opportunity for police officers to develop mentor or coaching relationships with the youth.

As demonstrated by the Atlanta Police Department, a comprehensive, creative campaign to increase diversity is possible to implement. While the Atlanta police department may devote more resources than others to support its recruiting efforts, it is clear that money is not the only driving force behind innovative recruitment. Like the Providence and Warwick police departments, the Atlanta Police Department has strong leadership that prioritizes diversity, a supportive staff that works hard to implement this vision and solid partnerships with various city and community agencies.

ethnic and gender make up of each department; current recruiting policies and procedures for each department; and whether each department has any type of initiative to increase diversity. Half of the departments responded to the survey.

In most states, most police departments are quite small, and issues of diversity generally do not receive much attention. But the statewide picture is often dominated by the sum of these many small departments. Diversifying small departments is necessary to improve the statewide picture. This is evident in Rhode Island, where 18 police departments outside of Providence employ 1,020 officers, of whom more than 96 percent are white. The median size of these 18 police agencies is 40 officers.

As seen in the below table, racial, ethnic and gender diversity is a considerable challenge for Rhode Island police departments. Of the 19 departments that responded to the survey, 10 are comprised entirely of white officers and 15 are comprised of less than 5 percent minority officers.

Statewide Pictures of the Diversity Challenge: Kentucky and Rhode Island

To illustrate how diversity can be advanced on a statewide basis, researchers at the Kennedy School of Government started by examining the extent of diversity among the police departments in one state, Rhode Island. The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights recently conducted similar work in its state.

The Diversity Challenge in Rhode Island Police Departments

Researchers surveyed all 38 Rhode Island police departments about: the current racial,

RACE, ETHNICITY AND GENDER OF SWORN OFFICERS IN SELECTED RHODE ISLAND POLICE DEPARTMENTS, WITH PERCENTAGE WHITE POPULATION

Police Department	Total Number of Sworn Officers	Percent White Officers	Percent White Population	Percent African American Officers	Percent Asian Officers	Percent Hispanic Officers	Percent Native Officers	Percent Female Officers	Percent Total Minority Officers
Bristol	40	100%	96.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2.5%	0%
Burrville	25	100%	Unknown	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	0%
Coventry	57	98.25%	95.5%	0%	0%	1.75%	0%	3.5%	1.75%
Cranston	151	96.04%	89.2%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	.06%	7.9%	3.96%
Cumberland	62	100%	96.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10.7%	0%
East Greenwich	34	100%	95.6%	0%	0%	0%		16%	0%
Hopkinton	16	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6.2%	0%
Middletown	38	Unknown ²	89.1%	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	10.5%	Unknown ³
New Shoreham	4	100%	97.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
North Providence	71	95.8%	92%	2.8%	0%	1.4%	0%	4.2%	4.2%
North Smithfield	22	100%	98.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	0%
Pawtucket	147	92.51%	75.4%	4.08%	0.68%	2.72%	0%	5.4%	7.4%
Providence	491	80.3%	54.5%	9.6%	2.6%	7.3%	0.2%	7.3%	19.7%
Scituate	18	100%	98.1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5.5%	0%
South Kingstown	54	96.3%	91.1%	0%	1.85%	1.85%	0%	13%	3.7%
Tiverton	28	100%	98%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	0%
Warwick	180	94%	95.2%	1.1%	2.7% ⁴	2.2%	0%	10%	6%
West Greenwich	11	100%	97.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Woonsocket	100	98%	83.1%	1%	1%	0%		5%	2%

² This department responded that police officers are not required to list their race or ethnicity at the time of hiring and thus said that they did not know the breakdown of officers by race and ethnicity.

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⁴ This category was marked as “other.”

Police Force Diversity in Kentucky

In January 2006, the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights published a study, *Promoting Law Enforcement Diversity, A Demographic Survey of Police and Sheriff Departments*, which points to the low level of police force diversity in Kentucky. The study featured a voluntary survey sent to 344 police departments in the state, of which 148 (43 percent) were returned completed. The findings were dismal: only 32 percent of all responding police and sheriff departments employ African American officers, and many of these departments employ only one black officer. Only 10 percent of the responding agencies employ Hispanic or Latino officers. Women account for just nine percent of officers among responding agencies.

Researchers found the smallest, mostly rural departments, which employ one to five employees, are almost entirely white and male. The study notes that while these communities have small minority populations, that is no reason to dissuade minority recruitment and retention. “Persons transiting these communities will represent the statewide diversity found in Kentucky. The distinct absence of minorities on these forces poses a special challenge to have all people feel welcome anywhere they travel within the state.”

Other points emphasized in the Kentucky report are the need to cultivate cross-cultural competency among law enforcement agencies, and the value of foreign language skills for officers, who must often interact with populations with limited English proficiency.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights plans to monitor efforts to improve recruitment and retention and conduct a

follow-up survey in two years.⁵ The Kentucky study offers a model for other human rights commissions to pursue in order to promote diversity among law enforcement agencies in their jurisdictions.

Diversity Strategies and Accreditation: Is There a Link?

Among the 19 Rhode Island police departments that responded to our survey, we found that the departments with the most creative strategies were those that were nationally accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). CALEA is an accreditation authority developed by joint efforts of the nation’s major executive law enforcement authorities.⁶ The centerpiece of the accreditation process is a body of professional standards to be used all types of law enforcement agencies, regardless of size, geographic location or functional responsibilities.

With several notable exceptions, in most states, relatively few police departments are accredited. Undeniably, achieving and maintaining accreditation requires substantial commitments of time and resources. Also, implementation of progressive recruitment strategies does not guarantee successful force diversification. However, for most departments outside major metropolitan areas, without such strategies in place there is little chance to achieve diversity. Accreditation arguably

⁵ See *Promoting Law Enforcement Diversity, A Demographic Survey of Police and Sheriff Departments*, January 2006. <http://kchr.ky.gov/pdf/1-25-06%20Police%20Demographics.pdf>

⁶ International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), National Sheriff’s Association (NSA) and Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

produces significant benefits for individual departments; implementation of robust diversity initiatives is just one. Human rights commissions and other civic organizations might want to encourage police departments to pursue accreditation, and to seek state funding to assist in the process.

The Bottom Line

Human Rights and Human Relations Commissions, along with other officials and community groups, can work with police departments to analyze the gaps in current

recruitment efforts and to develop new approaches. Recruitment efforts should strive toward building police forces whose members reflect the diversity of the wider society, even in overwhelmingly homogenous communities. A fundamental starting point is gathering the data to find out where you are losing women and minority candidates disproportionately to white male candidates. This information will form the basis of an informed, strategic recruiting effort. To gauge success, the information should be collected and reviewed periodically as new programs are put into place.

About the Project

The Kennedy School of Government's **Executive Session on Human Rights Commissions and Criminal Justice** convenes human rights, civil rights and police leaders from across the United States in a series of discussions about how to expand the role of human rights and human relations commissions in addressing issues of discrimination in U.S. criminal justice systems. In addition, the project aims to strengthen the ways that state and local governments respond to violations of the rights of people involved with the criminal justice system by documenting innovative work of individual commissions and conducting research on emerging practices.

Human rights commissions—in some cases known as human relations or community relations commissions—have various levels of authority to enforce civil rights laws and human rights standards, particularly those prohibiting discrimination and promising equal justice. Many also actively work to reduce and defuse inter-group conflict.

Human rights violations in the criminal justice context can take many forms. Bias crimes, and failure of law enforcement to investigate them; police mistreatment of minority groups, including racial profiling or the use of excessive force; and systematic failure to recruit minorities into law enforcement agencies: all of these forms of discrimination not only harm individuals directly involved but also victimize whole groups of people, straining communities sometimes to the breaking point.

The Executive Session, which runs from January 2006 through August 2008, employs a combination of rigorous discussion, empirical research, practical innovation and professional mobilization to expand the work of the commissions. Harvard faculty and staff facilitate the group's discussion and research. The project draws inspiration from the work of human rights commissions and ombudsmen around the globe. However, the focus of the program remains domestic, filling a peculiarly American gap in the available institutional mechanisms for redressing human rights violations related to crime and justice.

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About the Series

Executive Session Papers: Human Rights Commissions and the Criminal Justice System is a series of papers and case studies examining ways to expand the role of human rights and human relations commissions in addressing issues of discrimination in U.S. criminal justice systems.

Papers in the Series

HRC #1: *Building Trust After a Police Shooting: Community Intervention Teams in Columbus, Ohio* (August 2006)
HRC #2: *Increasing Diversity in Police Departments: Strategies and Tools for Human Rights Commissions and Others* (October 2006)

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