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TO PROTECT *and* TO SERVE

Enhancing the Efficiency of LAPD Recruiting

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Summary

Unlike many large metropolitan police departments nationwide that are struggling to meet their authorized force strength, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is succeeding in its ambitious five-year effort to increase the number of officers by 1,000. On March 2, 2008, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and LAPD chief William J. Bratton announced that the LAPD had reached 9,895 police officers—a new record for the department (Blankstein and Winton, 2009).

The LAPD is meeting its recruiting goal by working closely with a partner agency, the City of Los Angeles Personnel Department. The personnel department performs key functions in the process. These functions include marketing, testing and screening, background investigation, and medical and psychological examinations. Both agencies have been exemplary in their implementation of leading best practices in the field of police recruiting. Even though the LAPD and the personnel department are on track to achieve the hiring goal, the agencies have been operating close to the margin, often meeting the quota at the very end of the month. In addition, the LAPD needs to meet diversity goals stipulated by consent decrees.

Given the declining demand for labor in the local economy— the Los Angeles County unemployment rate has risen to 10.5 percent in February 2009 (Lifsher, 2009)—the LAPD is likely to meet its ambitious goal. In fact, a near-term challenge for the LAPD and the personnel department may become how to efficiently identify the most-promising candidates from a large number of applicants. This is

especially important because the background investigation process is labor intensive.

To make the situation even more difficult, the severe downturn in the economy could affect operational resources, as the worsening economic conditions in recent months have severely affected the fiscal conditions of the City of Los Angeles budget. As of February 2009, the city's budget deficit is projected at $427 million for the 2009–2010 fiscal year (FY), and Mayor Villaraigosa is already considering widespread city layoffs and deep cuts to services (Willon, 2009). Therefore, the agencies need to find new and innovative ways to further improve the efficiency and productivity of their processes.

This monograph aims to assist the LAPD and the personnel department in their effort to enhance productivity and efficiency of the police officer recruiting and hiring process. RAND's research team worked closely with the LAPD and the personnel department to identify key research areas with high potential for additional productivity and efficiency. These research areas were as follows:

- Evaluate allocation of marketing resources and recruiting efforts.
- Identify a way to streamline and prioritize applicants in the recruiting process that can meet both recruiting volume and diversity goals.
- Improve productivity and efficiency of the Background Investigation Division.

RAND's research team analyzed survey data and administrative data from the LAPD and the personnel department. In addition, we conducted interviews with key leaders of both departments.

Chapter One provides background information and a conceptual framework that guides our analyses. Chapter Two addresses both facets of the LAPD's marketing—recruitment and advertising—and offers empirically based guidance on which recruitment events are most worthwhile, where future recruitment efforts might be targeted, and ways to market and collect marketing data more effectively. Chapter Three discusses a scoring method we devised that can be used to prioritize candidates, especially during the background investigation

stage, but that is also applicable to other stages of the process. Chapter Four proposes changes to the personnel department's Background Investigation Division to increase efficiency and productivity. Chapter Five describes ways to enhance planning and operational tools we introduce in previous chapters and areas of research that are needed to find additional efficiency and productivity in the recruiting process.

Findings and Recommendations

We briefly describe our recommendations and related major findings in the following paragraphs.

Recommendation 1: Events Unrelated to Employment Perform Poorly by Short-Term Recruiting Metrics but Should Be Evaluated for Their Ability to Strengthen the LAPD Brand

Through examination of recruiters' after-action reports, which contain summary recruitment-event information, such as estimated attendance and the number of names added to the interest-tracking log (ITL), we found that events focused on employment, rather than any sporting contest, hobby, or cultural celebration, yielded more contacts. The Recruitment and Employment Division (RED) should either be more circumspect about sending recruiters to events that are unrelated to job-seeking or staff such events with the goal of strengthening the LAPD brand and the expectation that this may not be reflected in the number of immediate contacts. By attending sporting events, fitness expos, and the like, the recruiters can link the LAPD to activities that have proven popular with actual law-enforcement recruits in the region. These links, like other forms of advertising, may prove pivotal when event attendees are more in the mind-set of choosing a career. Events that are advertised in advance and, in the case of job fairs, charge a registration fee also tend to yield more contacts. The time of day of the event and whether it is located in the city or the county are not important determinants of the number of candidates expressing interest.

Recommendation 2: Continue Making Recruiting Inroads on Junior-College Campuses

As Table S.1 shows, LAPD recruiting expos are the most fruitful and efficient events for attracting qualified candidates (i.e., applicants who are eventually hired). Given the paramilitary nature of law-enforcement work, it is somewhat counterintuitive that fewer hires were obtained from on-site recruit tests (also known as "pocket tests") at military bases than at junior-college campuses. Although the hiring rate per number of candidates tested is nearly the same for military and school pocket tests, more than three times as many hires were obtained from campus pocket tests as from military tests. It is possible that the LAPD faces more competition with other area law-enforcement agencies for applicants with military training and discipline; qualified candidates may be testing with the LAPD but ultimately opting to work for another agency. The appropriate inference is not that military recruiting should be scaled back, especially given President Barack Obama's stated agenda of withdrawing troops from Iraq in the near term, but rather that campus recruiting is not an inferior alternative, as is sometimes supposed.

Recommendation 3: Consider Staging Recruiting Events in Neglected, Underperforming Areas

The LAPD is concentrating its recruiting efforts in the City of Los Angeles, which makes a good deal of sense strategically and logistically. There are, however, clusters of ZIP Codes™ in Los Angeles County not far from city limits that are substantially underperforming in terms of

Table S.1
Number of Candidates Hired in FY 2007–2008 Through Recruiting-Event Pocket Tests in FY 2007–2008

Event Category	Pocket Tests	Number Tested	Number Hired	Hire Rate (%)
LAPD expo	9	522	36	6.9
Military	30	391	10	2.6
School	56	1,257	34	2.7

SOURCE: Authors' analysis of city personnel data.

overall applicants or target-group applicants. Among them are a region along the 710 freeway that includes South Gate, a region in the eastern San Gabriel Valley that includes Baldwin Park, and North Long Beach. The Recruiting and Employment Division should consider holding events in these areas. Conversely, it may want to reconsider staging recruitment events in the Malibu/Fernwood area.

Recommendation 4: Tailor Media Mix to Attract Diversity Target Groups

Exposure to various advertising media varies across target groups. In some instances, the finding only confirms an obvious targeted marketing campaign, as in the case of Asian/Pacific Islander candidates indicating higher exposure to television ads that air exclusively on an Asian-language station. However, other examples are more serendipitous. Females and black candidates, for example, report greater exposure to recruiting events than the two groups with the highest propensity for joining the LAPD: white and Hispanic males. This means that recruiting events are a relatively cost-effective way to recruit females and blacks.

Recommendation 5: Revise the Marketing Surveys to Better Gauge Marketing Influences

Unnecessary discrepancies between the online and application marketing surveys, such as different race/ethnicity choices and different number and set of options regarding information sources, should be reconciled. Rather than using both surveys to measure marketing exposure, the online survey could be used to measure how well the department's marketing strategy of diverting all users to the recruiting Web site is working; the application survey could be used to measure the importance of various information sources and advertising influences in a candidate's decision to apply to the LAPD.

Recommendation 6: Encourage Applicants with Clean Preliminary Background Applications to Complete the Application Process

By far, the greatest gains in applicant qualification rates would come from increasing the pool of applicants who have no issues noted on

their Preliminary Background Application (PBA). On average, the predicted qualification rate of applicants without issues on their PBAs is higher than that of any other geographic or demographic group. While explicitly making individuals with clean personal histories targets of marketing and recruitment efforts would be nearly impossible, PBA outcomes are correlated with other observable characteristics that may be more amenable to direct recruitment. As seen in Table S.2, applicants from Los Angeles County tend to have better PBA outcomes than applicants from the rest of Southern California, while the proportion of issue-free PBAs increases with education level.

Recommendation 7: Assign Scores to Prioritize Candidates

Prioritization is a valuable tool in that it can influence the quantity and quality of recruits, is cost neutral, and is completely within the control of the personnel department and the LAPD. Each candidate should be assigned a score to streamline the hiring process for those with the highest probability of success. The components of the score are educational attainment, residency, and PBA outcome. Table S.3 reports a potential system of priority points for the three characteristics. Each applicant's priority score is the sum of the points for each component. The score has a maximum of 35 points (for a college-experienced applicant from L.A. County who has no PBA issues) and a minimum of 0 (for an applicant who has no high-school diploma, lives anywhere outside of Southern California, and has PBA results that indicate a likely disqualification from consideration).

The personnel department and the LAPD can supplement priority scores to help the LAPD meet consent-decree requirements for diversity in hiring. We illustrate a way to adjust the priority scores in the report. The primary goal of the illustration is not to set additional prioritization points permanently for various demographic groups but to develop a framework that the personnel department and the LAPD can use to adjust as the labor pool changes and the department's goals change.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that the personnel department and the LAPD routinely replicate our analysis to assess the value of

Table S.2
Percentage of Applicants with No PBA Issues, by Selected Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Percentage with Clean PBA	Number
Location		
Other United States	35	916
L.A. County	32	6,464
Other Southern Calif.	28	2,639
Education		
< high-school diploma	27	609
High-school diploma	29	6,748
Some college	34	942
Bachelor's or higher	42	1,736
Race/ethnicity		
Asian/Pacific Islander	41	983
White	34	3,085
Hispanic	30	4,769
Black	22	1,244
Sex		
Female	36	1,700
Male	31	8,381
Age (years)		
20–24	33	2,463
25–29	31	4,044
30–34	30	1,885
35–39	35	976
40+	33	712

SOURCE: Authors' analysis of city personnel records.

Table S.3
Priority-Score Component Points for Applicants Who Pass the Personal Qualifications Essay

Applicant Characteristic	Points
PBA status	
PBA DQ	0
PBA issues	13
PBA OK	22
Location	
Other United States	0
Other Southern California	2
L.A. County	5
Education	
< high-school diploma	0
High-school diploma	4
Some college	8
Bachelor's or higher	8

NOTE: DQ = disqualified.

prioritization on the likelihood of joining and to optimize the additional prioritization points to meet recruiting and hiring goals.

Recommendation 8: Triage Applicants Based on the Priority Score

Both the background investigators (BIs) and personnel analysts (PAs) should use the priority score described earlier to manage work flow and expedite case packet processing for the most-promising candidates. Using an agreed-on threshold, the division would resolve to process the case packets of candidates below the threshold only if there were no case packets from candidates above the threshold.

Recommendation 9: Integrate the Background Investigators and Personnel Analysts into Investigation Teams

We recommend that the personnel department reorganize the Background Investigation Division by integrating BIs and PAs into investigation teams. Each team should contain both BIs and PAs and should be responsible for meeting a monthly production target. Accordingly, BIs and PAs should share a single database to track cases. For maximum efficiency, everyone needs to be located near his or her team members. Therefore, the personnel department should relocate BIs and PAs to eliminate any physical barrier, such as a hallway, between the two groups.

Recommendation 10: Institute On-the-Job Training Based on Experience of the Most-Productive Background Investigators and Seasoned Personnel Analysts

The personnel department uses whole-person analysis (WPA) to evaluate applicants. The WPA was instituted by the Civil Service Commission in 2003. WPA evaluates a candidate's overall conduct to determine whether the candidate's strengths outweigh his or her weaknesses in terms of employability and administrative risk factors. Circumstances, such as the candidate's age, attitude, and explanation for conduct, are taken into consideration. Therefore, an effective implementation of WPA requires BIs and PAs to take into account multiple dimensions of an applicant's qualifications and life history. We recommend that the personnel department develop on-the-job training for BIs and PAs to ensure consistent application of WPA.

The most-productive BIs and experienced PAs should be asked to lead workshops describing how they approach key aspects of the investigation process. Joint BI/PA staff meetings should be held monthly to discuss emergent issues. The meetings are also an opportune time for recognizing the top-performing BI/PA teams before the entire division.

Recommendation 11: Celebrate Achievements

Top performers among BIs and PAs should be "paid in respect" for their contributions by appointing them to lead on-the-job training

sessions sharing their experience with the rest of the BIs and PAs. In addition, the personnel department should directly celebrate their performance. The celebration of achievements can take many forms. The personnel department may choose the format that fits the culture of its workforce. But to fully reap the benefits, any celebration of achievements the personnel department creates need to include a few basic features: (1) they should be public, (2) they should bring together both BIs and PAs for achieving concrete missions, (3) they should be frequent enough for the workforce to be reminded of their achievements, and (4) the few rewards for achievements, even though they are nonfinancial, must be something meaningful for the workforce. For instance, we recommend that the personnel department publicly celebrate achievements monthly, quarterly, and annually. For the annual celebration of achievements, the personnel department may want to invite public figures whom the staff would feel privileged to meet, such as the mayor of Los Angeles or the chief of police.

Recommendation 12: Evaluate Reforms

We recommended various ways in which to improve the productivity and efficiency of the LAPD recruiting process. Some of our recommendations are relatively easy, since they require only minor changes to the existing processes. But some of our recommendations pose greater challenges to implement because they involve new methods of data collection or, as in the Background Investigation Division, organizational restructuring.

We have been gratified to learn that the personnel department and the LAPD have already implemented some of our recommendations. For example, the personnel department and the LAPD computed RAND priority scores for a cohort of applicants and started using these scores to prioritize among applicants.

The personnel department and the LAPD need to evaluate the effectiveness of these reforms. For instance, the agencies need to calibrate the priority scores with the experiences of the BIs who are using these scores. The calibration may identify ways to improve the priority scores. The agencies may add new variables—such as an applicant's military experience. (During our study, an applicant's military experi-

ence was not recorded in the administrative data. But now, the personnel department collects the information and stores it in its central database.) Moreover, the agencies may create different scores for different stages of the recruiting process—one score for recruiters and mentors, another for BIs.

More importantly, given the new recruiting environment, we recommend that the LAPD and the personnel department examine potential reallocation of resources between marketing and the background investigation. As the local labor-market conditions worsen, the LAPD and the personnel department may not need the same level of marketing and recruiting resources but may need additional numbers of BIs and PAs to process a high volume of applicants. Evaluation of various options will require that the LAPD and the personnel department conduct rigorous cost-benefit analysis of possible resource allocations across different stages of the recruiting process.