

# Surviving the Staffing Shortage Crisis

Strategies for Achieving Law Enforcement Staffing Demands



# The Challenge

*Law enforcement leaders are currently facing unprecedented challenges in recruitment and retention of their workforce. With retirement rates up, new recruits in short supply and multiple social, political and economic factors -- agencies are struggling with critical staffing shortages that range from boots-on-the-street to 911 dispatchers.*

*This staffing crisis has ripple effects for agencies nationwide and the communities they serve. Staffing shortages mean longer shifts for sworn and civilian personnel alike with increased overtime cost. On-duty personnel backfilling gaps eventually become fatigued and burned out working longer hours. Longer wait times for calls-for-service, with less crimes solved at increased cost.*

*It's a critical trend that won't correct itself overnight.*

***In this eBook we'll present strategies to help prevent the avalanching effects of today's staffing shortages.***

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# FIRST THINGS FIRST -- WORKFORCE RETENTION

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*The key goal of any agency's retention efforts should focus on what attracts employees to your organization while limiting, as best as possible, what causes them to leave. Successful workforce retention often comes down to simply identifying what the employee wants and providing it. The following strategies will help you build a workforce culture that can result in long-term retention.*

## **Many retention techniques are obvious.**

Creating a **positive work environment** with **adequate pay and benefits** supports long-term retention. Establishing a **culture of recognition and appreciation** with programs that acknowledge hard work and dedication to service can help to offset the inherent stressors that come with the job.

## **Continuous, relevant training builds competency in performance.**

Continuous training programs can range from self-paced computer training to scenario-based field exercises. Providing **continuous, relevant training** enables officers to feel valued, more confident and more likely to stay.

## **Equally important is ensuring that your personnel are supported.**

Support can take different forms. It should include **providing adequate resources** for your workforce to perform their jobs -- or **ways to help them advance**. Focus on reinforcing what motivates each of your employees. This could take the form of **job shadowing, rotations, or cross training**.

Agencies should also consider providing **programs that support employees as long-term agency members** -- such as **health and wellness screenings, gym memberships, stress management classes, or financial planning**.



# INNOVATIONS IN RECRUITMENT

## Quantify your vacancy gaps.

It's essential to understand your minimum staffing requirements. **Knowing in advance where your gaps** are will enable you to **reassign on-duty personnel** or, if needed, backfill with overtime assignments. By **identifying your vacancy gaps against the increased overtime cost**, you'll be better able to **quantify new hire funding justifications**.


## Lead with inspiration and why your agency's great.

In order to attract candidates, you must make sure your agency's **reputation is positive**, and that you are offering **competitive wages and benefits**. Some agencies are including **hiring bonuses** with a portion received as of hire dates and the remainder after several years of service.

Focus on the positives and **pitch your agency as a storyteller**. Discuss **benefits about the family they'll be joining** and the **community they'll be serving**.

## Help recruits navigate the rigors of the academy.

Equally important is **retaining cadets** as they move through academy training. Make sure your cadets **know what to expect and are up for the mental and physical exertion**. Have them **partner with fellow cadets** to support teamwork. Reinforce the need to be **well rested, on-time** and to **develop a thick skin**. Learning academy skills will serve them well through field training and their entire career.



*A recent U.S. Dept. of Justice study found 14% of recruits will not graduate.*

# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TIPS

Recruitment and retention is expected to remain a major concern for years to come. Without a new generation of talented and committed members, your workforce will be doing more with fewer alternatives. By utilizing some of these tips, you'll have better opportunities to successfully recruit and retain personnel, while creating a more efficient and effective workforce.

**1** Cultivate a positive image and reputation.

When competing for the same small pool of applicants, it is **vital that they want to work for you**. If applicants do not feel that you will provide them with a **positive work environment** in which they will be able to **grow professionally and trust their command-chain**, you will lose the hiring war before the first battle is fought.

**2** Identify your target audience.

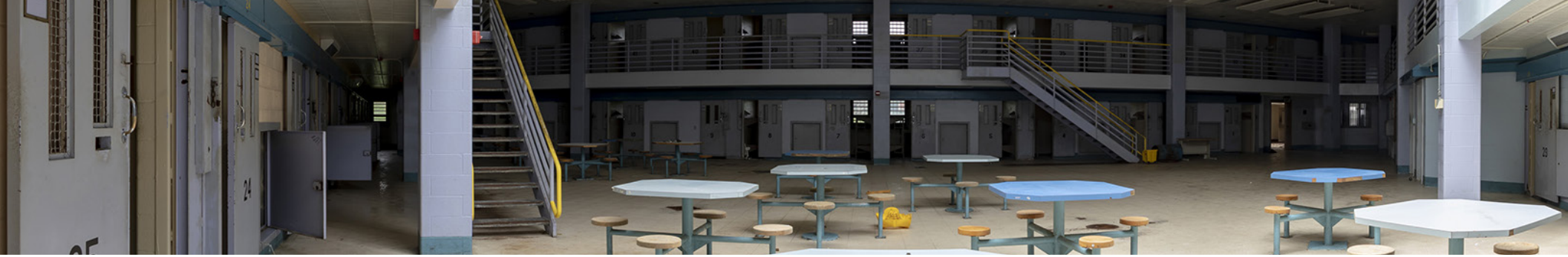
Define who your **ideal recruit** may be, **seek them out**, and **let them know you exist**. You may need to revamp your recruiting strategies to make it easier for candidates to find you. Use **social media**. Try **internal recruiting, partnering with schools or military bases**. Use **media outlets** or **hosting a day-in-the-life event**. Go to where candidates are and connect with them frequently.

**3** Provide continuous, relevant training.

Empower academies to **develop, schedule, and deliver ongoing training that is relevant**. Training **curriculum's can take various forms based on career preference** -- such as criminal investigations, working with firearms, self-defense, first aid or computer skills. Your workforce will grow professionally, have the skill sets needed to effectively perform their jobs, and will be better prepared to mitigate risks.

**4** Offer additional perks.

Extra pay and benefits can be difficult to come by. Look for **alternative means of compensation**. Offering perks like **on-site gyms, take-home cars, community event participation** or **schedules that allow for longer stretches of days off** can deliver returns that are far greater than their cost. Think out of the box.



## MANAGING LONG SHIFTS

Law enforcement personnel often face life-or-death decisions, so proper rest is essential. That's not easy when working lengthy shifts to fill vacancies. While it's critical to effectively manage long shifts, it's equally important to **understand the demands on personnel and adjust workloads accordingly.**

While some agencies have tried 10-hour shifts, they create an overlap in 24-hour scheduling. Meanwhile, despite seemingly providing a better work-life balance, 8-hour shifts actually result in more overtime and lower quality of life.

**All that is to say the 12-hour system is widely regarded as the best way to manage shifts.**

*According to a study, "officers assigned to 8-hour shifts worked more than five times as much overtime per two-week period (5.75 hours) as officers on 10-hour shifts (0.97 hrs.) -- and more than three times as much as those on 12-hour shifts (1.89 hrs.)."*

One solution to cutting down on fatigue is rotating shifts. This scheduling method allows each person on your team to get some rest after they've completed a full shift.

But rotating shifts isn't always ideal. Many law enforcement personnel don't prefer working rotations, which can disrupt the circadian rhythm and lead to other adverse health effects. In fact, many health and public safety employees who work on rotating shifts get less sleep.

**Better than attempting to reinvent shifts, agencies should put policies in place that help mitigate overtime and outside employment.**

Technology can be used to **automate agency policies that support minimum staffing and fatigue management.** This could include **data alerts that prevent excessive work schedules** or **analytics that identify staffing trends.**

*With law enforcement personnel often facing life-threatening situations, it's critical that they operate at peak performance. Working excessive overtime or on-call shifts to fill vacancies, combined with the job's inherently stressors can build-up bodily cortisol.*

*Over a prolonged time, raised cortisol levels can lead to immunodeficiency, high blood pressure, an enlarged heart, and more. The World Health Organization has linked high levels of cortisol to 'burnout,' characterized by:*

- ◇ *Feeling of energy exhaustion*
- ◇ *Feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job*
- ◇ *Reduced professional efficacy*

*While an extra shift here and there isn't a big deal, constantly picking up additional shifts and working overtime to fill staffing vacancies isn't good for your workforce, your agency and the communities you serve.*

## ADDRESSING STRESS AND FATIGUE

As agencies across the country face current staff shortages, **workforce fatigue has reached a tipping point.** Consider implementing fatigue management strategies that include:

- ◇ Policies that correspond with overtime, secondary employment, swaps and time-off
- ◇ Keeping schedules as predictable as possible
- ◇ Reexamining shift start and end times
- ◇ Keeping consecutive night shifts to a minimum
- ◇ Keeping overtime to a minimum
- ◇ Considering alternative shift lengths

### **It's critical to address the mental state of your fatigued personnel.**

Agencies should proactively address the effects of shift-work on their workforce by **offering access to mental health services and tailoring employee schedules to decrease overtime and increase rest periods.** It's equally important to **establish restorative programs and develop peer support systems.**

While fatigue management is essential today, consider it a smart investment in your personnel and the public they serve 24/7.





## WHAT ABOUT OVERTIME?

*Agencies have relied on overtime for years to meet minimum staffing levels. Overtime was often more cost effective than hiring new personnel. That's quickly changing.*

### **Overtime budgets are skyrocketing.**

Due to today's staffing shortages, officers are now being reported to earn three times their regular salaries – all at the taxpayer's expense. **Overtime comes with costs that aren't just financial.** Fatigue and burnout becomes inevitable when working too many hours and can lead to impaired performance or short-term retention.

### **Scheduling and staffing policies are essential.**

Agency policies should **include an analysis of consecutive work hours, overtime, and time spent on secondary off-duty employment.** While giving your workforce a voice regarding their **shift preferences, vacation dates, or shift swaps supports retention** -- it is imperative to **analyze how these procedures impact fatigue and budget.**

### **Technology is an effective means to automate your staffing policies.**

Whether using **conflict alerting, push notifications to mobile devices, or data-driven analytics,** technology is a **proven means that mitigates fatigue risks and ballooning overtime cost.** For example, technology automation can be used to:

- ◆ **Backfill overtime assignments** based on least earned, qualified employee
- ◆ **Push notifications to qualified personnel** for quick vacancy backfills
- ◆ **Flag fatigue alerts as part of requests** for overtime, off-duty jobs or shift swaps
- ◆ **Control OT & fatigue by limiting hours worked** between on-duty and off-duty jobs
- ◆ **Minimize fatigue by limiting the number of swap hours** weekly or in a pay period



# RETHINKING THE FUTURE OF SCHEDULING

To begin your scheduling assessment, it's essential to determine your minimum staffing level requirements. While prisons and jails often rely on bed count levels, sheriff and police departments typically use one of five approaches to make staffing level decisions.

- ◆ Current crime trends
- ◆ Per-capita approach
- ◆ Minimum manning levels
- ◆ Authorized/budgeted levels
- ◆ Workload-based models

Once staffing levels are defined, technology can be used to identify where and when you'll need to fill vacancies. Staffing level forecasting, cost effective assignment recommendations and scheduling analytics have become essential tools for the future of scheduling.

There isn't one perfect solution for any agency. But effectively coordinating 24/7/365 operations that require critical equipment and qualified personnel when minimum staffing levels are below requirements calls for robust agency-wide planning.

**Fortunately, technology and its automation efficiencies provides one of the most effective means of supporting staffing challenges.**



- ◆ **Forecasting vacancy gaps** enables proactive reassignments that can minimize overtime cost.
- ◆ **Using push notifications to mobile devices** informs personnel about scheduling changes, assignment vacancies that must be filled or scheduling requests that must be authorized.
- ◆ **Automating labor-intense scheduling processes**, such as vacation or schedule bidding, saves time and enables employee self-service capabilities.
- ◆ **Automatically tracking OT against cost centers** enables real-time funding awareness.
- ◆ **Using auto-leave approval based on agency criteria** saves time for supervisory personnel while ensuring that minimum staffing levels are not affected.
- ◆ **Replacing outdated time clock hardware** with re-purposed laptops or PC's that use geofencing software to capture personnel time and attendance reduces capital expenditures.

## CONCLUSION

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*The current staffing shortage in law enforcement will not correct itself overnight. Agencies will continue to do what they must to respond effectively to 911 calls-for-services and prioritize crime prevention.*

*But in light of the current staffing crisis, agencies of all sizes simply must implement new strategies in recruitment, retention and how to best manage their current staffing levels.*

*The law enforcement profession as a whole will continue to struggle if recruiting and retention methods remain the same as they were at the turn of the century. Things are much different today. Recruiting and retention strategies simply must change. With this in mind, we trust that this eBook has provided you with new strategies to help your agency adapt to these changing times.*



**To learn how Orion can help increase  
your staffing efficiencies contact us at  
866-779-1689 or go to [www.orioncom.com](http://www.orioncom.com).**



## ABOUT ORION

Orion is 100% dedicated to providing operational workforce management solutions for the Federal, State and Local public safety workforce. Our mission is to deliver a best-in-class cloud-based portfolio that supports professionals running public safety organizations and the employees serving your communities.

Unlike other providers, Orion solutions are designed exclusively to support the complexities of managing public safety personnel. From complex scheduling and payroll exports, to asset and training management, our operational workforce software and industry expertise are what agencies nationwide rely on 24/7.

When we say that we “Serve Those Who Serve” – we mean it. This is our mission and we’ve been doing it for over two decades.





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