



— **What Works: The Social Science Research**
Behind Advancing Women in Policing

RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT

30X30

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30X30

ADVANCING WOMEN IN POLICING
30% WOMEN RECRUITS BY 2030

About

The 30×30 Initiative is a coalition of police leaders, researchers, and professional organizations who have joined together to advance the representation and experiences of women in policing agencies across the United States.

The Initiative is based on the importance of achieving at least 30% representation to empower a group to influence an organization's culture. This 30% threshold is where change begins to happen, but it is not our end goal. 30×30 is working with policing agencies to improve recruiting practices and establish community partnerships so that agencies become truly representative of the jurisdictions they serve. While 30×30 is focused on advancing women in policing, these principles are applicable to all demographic diversity, not just gender.

Our ultimate goal is to increase the representation of women in police recruit classes to 30% by 2030, and to ensure police policies and culture intentionally support the success of qualified women officers throughout their careers.

Currently, women make up only 12% of sworn officers and 3% of police leadership in the U.S. This underrepresentation of women in policing undermines public safety. Research shows women officers use force less, and use less excessive force; achieve better outcomes for crime victims, especially in sexual assault cases; are perceived by communities as being more honest and compassionate, and make fewer discretionary arrests.

What Works

showcases the social science on which the 30×30 Initiative is built.

This collection is one of many resources and summaries of the latest research on the experiences of women in policing, including concrete, evidence-informed steps that agencies can take to address the barriers that hold women back at every stage of their careers.

We are grateful to the following individuals whose work made this compilation possible, and to every participating agency who has pledged to advance women in policing.

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30x30initiative.org/what-works

What Works: Recruitment and Assessment

INTRODUCTION

We have examined more than 100 pieces of social scientific literature that cover existing practices in policing, 25 of which specifically address existing barriers and potential avenues to recruit and assess potential women officers more effectively. This summary synthesizes their findings and provides recommended courses of action from the 30x30 Pledge.

Such works provide concrete recommendations for establishing police departments that are more equitable, effective, and just. They critically examine key phases of an officer's career and offer recommendations to improve their experiences at all levels.

Recruitment considers the procedures and means by which departments attempt to attract prospective applicants. Assessment entails the evaluations and examinations new hires must undergo to graduate from police academy.



Photo: Boulder Police Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no national standardization in recruitment and assessment practices in policing. This is significant in that candidate recruitment and assessment directly impact agencies' ability to be more representative of the communities they serve. Diverse departments are believed to be more equitable, sensitive to the needs of diverse groups, and improve the overall integrity of the organization.¹ If gender and racial diversity are crucial, it is necessary to reshape recruitment practices to better engage more communities and encourage them to join the police profession.

The literature point to three phenomena:

- Current recruitment strategies must more effectively reach diverse populations. Women comprise only 12% of police departments in the United States—with a less than 10% increase in females joining the police force in recent years.²
- Current assessments must equitably assess recruits and accurately reflect the realities of policing.
- Current policies and norms, influenced by a “male-dominated culture” hinder individuals from applying at the outset.³

Greater investments of time and resources toward strengthening recruitment and assessment practices, establishing best practices among police departments at the local and state levels, and better analyses of existing and future strategies are needed to deliberately create more equitable and effective programs. This includes gathering more applicant data as well examining how different groups pass assessments, determining the extent to which assessments accurately evaluate an applicant's ability to do the job, and understanding how diverse candidates currently perceive the departments to which they apply.

The next section elaborates related key findings.

¹ Bradbury and Kellough “Representative Bureaucracy: Exploring the Potential for Active Representation in Local Government.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18, no. 4 (2008);
Choi, et al “Does Increasing Gender Representativeness and Diversity Improve Organizational Integrity?” *Public Personnel Management* 47, no. 1 (2017);
Centola, et al “Experimental evidence for tipping points in social convention.” *Science* 360 (2018);
Lonsway *Hiring & Retaining More Women: The Advantages to Law Enforcement Agencies*. Educational Resources Information Center (2000);
Schuck “Female Officers and Community Policing: Examining the Connection between Gender Diversity and Organizational Change.” *Women & Criminal Justice* 27, no. 5 (2017).
² Cordner, Gary and AnnMarie Cordner. “Stuck on a plateau? Obstacles to recruitment, selection, and retention of women police.” *Police Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2011).
³ Cordner, 2011

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INVEST IN RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES TO MORE EFFECTIVELY REACH DIVERSE APPLICANTS.

Using data gathered by the Police Executive Research Forum of some 1,000 police departments across the country, scholars William Jordan, Lorie Fridell, Donald Faggiani, and Bruce Kubu found that only one in five agencies has strategic plans and programs to better attract minority applicants. For those organizations that do have targeted recruitment strategies, they found a positive correlation between their recruitment budgets and the numbers of applications received from diverse candidates—**agencies embracing such practices were found to increase their number of diverse hires 3.2 times.**⁴

In addition, agencies should consider the language and messages used to recruit applicants. A 2018 study by public policy scholar Elizabeth Linos examined the effectiveness of statements used in recruit ads, and which motivated individuals to apply more than others. Linos measured responses to advertisements emphasizing serving the community, the challenging nature of police work, and the benefits of joining the force. **Ultimately, advertisements underscoring the personal and career benefits, versus a message of public service, more effectively attracted diverse applicants—without an observable loss in applicant quality.**⁵



Photo: Northampton Police Department

⁴ Jordan, William T., Lorie Fridell, Donald Faggiani and Bruce Kubu. "Attracting females and racial/ethnic minorities to law enforcement." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 37, no. 4 (July-August 2009); Clinkinbeard, Samantha, Starr Solomon, and Rachel Rief. "Why Did You Become a Police Officer? Entry-Related Motives and Concerns of Women and Men in Policing." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* (February 12, 2021); Linos, Elizabeth. "More than Public Service: A Field Experiment on Job Advertisements and Diversity in the Police." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (January 2018).

⁵ Linos, 2018

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RECRUIT ASSESSMENTS MUST MORE EQUITABLY TEST ALL CANDIDATES.

Scholars at the National Center for Women and Policing found that physical fitness tests advantaged younger and male recruits by emphasizing upper-body strength. Moreover, **such tests not only prevented female recruits from progressing in the applicant process, the exams did not always accurately reflect contemporary physical responsibilities of police officers.**⁶

A recent New Jersey media report highlighted rates of failure of physical tests across police academies in the state. New Jersey ranks behind 31 states and the District of Columbia for women participating in law enforcement. In 2016, one-third of the departments in the state employed no female police officers. Still, in 2017, 31% of female recruits failed the police academy, as opposed to 2% of men, after the state limited the time for recruits who failed their first physical exam to three weeks to improve pushups, sit-ups, jumping and running.⁷

Research suggests that assessment processes should reflect a likely improvement in performance after training (e.g., conduct final physical fitness assessment at the end of the academy).⁸

A study conducted by public policy scholar Dr. Norma M. Riccucci examined law enforcement agencies nationwide to identify the impact of 'job knowledge' tests.⁹ She found that while virtually all U.S. police agencies—of varying sizes—utilize "job knowledge" tests, these tests are not necessarily correlated to future success in policing. In addition, legal scholar Mark Brodin draws from a series of legal cases to demonstrate how minority recruits are negatively affected by such tests.¹⁰ He contends that deep-seated economic, social, and educational inequality plays a large role in this. He cites legal scholars Lani Guinier and Susan Sturm who suggest that such tests "tell us more about [a person's] past opportunit[ies]," not the merits or qualifications of the applicants themselves.¹¹

⁶ Lonsway, Kimberly A., Michelle Wood, and Katherine Spillar. *Men, Women, and Police Excessive Force: A Tale of Two Genders*. Los Angeles, CA: National Center for Women and Policing, 2002; Lonsway, Kimberly A. "Hiring & Retaining More Women: The Advantages to Law Enforcement Agencies." Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Summer 2000; Lonsway, Kimberly A. "Tearing Down the Wall: Problems with Consistency, Validity, and Adverse Impact of Physical Agility Testing in Police Selection." *Police Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (September 2003); rueger, Kenneth and Chau Nguyen. *Patrol Officer Physical Demands Study*. California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, 2019; Schulze, Corina. "The Masculine Yardstick of Physical Competence: U.S. Police Academy Fitness Tests." *Women & Criminal Justice* 22, no. 2 (2012)

⁷ Ford, Andrew. "NJ police tests fail women recruits. Here's how it hurts your safety and your wallet." *Asbury Park Press*, July 29, 2019

⁸ "Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement," U.S. Department of Justice, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2016).

⁹ Riccucci, Norma M. "The Use of Written Exams in Police and Fire Departments: Implications for Social Diversity," *Review of Public Personnel Administration* (2015).

¹⁰ Brodin, Mark S. "Discriminatory Job Knowledge Tests, Police Promotions, and What Title VII Can Learn from Tort Law." *Boston College Law Review* 59, no. 7 (2018)

¹¹ Brodin, 2018

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SUPPORT WOMEN TO PERCEIVE POLICING AS A CAREER IN WHICH THEY HAVE A MEANINGFUL PLACE.

Women’s inherent minority status serves as an obstacle. In one study, women officers in Pennsylvania perceived more shortcomings in recruitment practices than did their chiefs, and emphasized the male-dominated cultures of police organizations as obstacles to both recruitment and retention of women officers.¹²

In some departments, female officers are subject to restrictive policies which regulate the exact lengths of female officers’ hair (such that “it does not extend below the bottom of the shirt collar”), and ban the use of makeup and other accessories. According to sociologists Anne Kringen and Madeleine Novich, the women are split in their reactions to the policy; some comply willingly while others struggle with compliance as loss of personal agency.¹³

Research also found such policies to disparately impact Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) officers, compounding the perception that the police force is not meant for them.¹⁴



¹² Cordner, 2011

¹³ Kringen & Novich, 2018

¹⁴ Kringen & Novich, 2018

What Works: Recruitment and Assessment

On Recruitment

- Collect and provide aggregated data as indicated:
 - Individuals responding to your recruitment strategies and/or attending recruitment events
 - Hiring data. Ensure assessors and background investigators receive bias training (or analogous training) at least annually.
- Articulate the duties and day-to-day activities of a police officer and what it takes for an officer to be effective in these scenarios. Does your recruitment content accurately represent the totality of these activities and skills? If not, revise accordingly.
- Do individuals in your recruitment content reflect the demographics of the community you serve? If not, revise accordingly.
- Review data about who is responding to your recruitment strategies and/or attending recruitment events. If you are not reaching the communities you seek to hire, engage experts and community leaders about how best to reach desired populations. Revise your strategy accordingly.



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On Assessment

- Review your assessment processes and identify areas that require subjective rather than objective assessment. Seek to minimize subjectivity.
- Articulate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences required to be an effective police officer in your jurisdiction. Compare these with the content of your assessments. Are your assessments measuring and prioritizing these items? If not, revise accordingly.
- Review the demographics of your assessors and background investigators. They ideally should reflect the demographics you seek to hire. Adjust if necessary.
- If your assessments have not yet undergone content validation or an analogous process, do so.
- Review your application process and identify possible barriers to completion, such as an arbitrary administrative fee. Remove barriers that are not directly tied to measuring applicant ability to serve as a sworn officer
- Review the demographic data of applicants at each stage of the hiring/assessment process. Are there points in your hiring and assessment process where you are losing a disproportionate number of women applicants? If so, are they necessary, validated, and objective? If not, remove them.

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