

March 2023

Critical Issues in Policing Series

WOMEN IN POLICE LEADERSHIP

10 Action Items for
Advancing Women and
Strengthening Policing



POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

CRITICAL ISSUES IN POLICING SERIES

Women in Police Leadership: 10 Action Items for Advancing Women and Strengthening Policing

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Acknowledgments

A GROWING BODY OF RESEARCH HAS DOCUMENTED the important role women play in modern policing and the tangible benefits women bring to the profession. This project adds to that research by focusing on women in police *leadership*. Through a national survey, focus groups and other discussions, plus a review of the literature, PERF has sought to better understand both the barriers that are keeping more women from attaining leadership positions in police agencies and the strategies and approaches that will help women and their agencies overcome those obstacles.

This report would not have been possible, nor as extensive and insightful, without the contributions of numerous individuals and organizations.

First, we thank all the women police officials who took the time to complete PERF's survey on women in police leadership. We started by sending the survey to all female members of PERF, about 500 in all. We then asked our members to share the survey with other women who might be interested in providing information to us. Through this "snowballing" technique, we ended up with 664 responses – a phenomenal level of feedback that demonstrates just how important this issue is and how passionate women in policing are about their profession and their careers.

PERF also thanks and appreciates the 17 women who participated in two virtual working group sessions that PERF held in the late summer of 2021. This diverse mix of police professionals – active and retired, sworn and professional staff, plus researchers and advocates – provided detailed and meaningful insights into the issues and themes that emerged

from the survey. (The names of the working group participants are listed on page 27.)

Thanks also to all the women – and men – who participated in the discussion of our survey findings during PERF's Annual Meeting in San Francisco on June 2, 2022. Like the working group participants, these highly accomplished and respected police leaders offered important perspectives on their own careers and who and what helped them along the way. (These individuals are named on page 43.)

PERF appreciates the support and leadership of the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives. NAWLEE has long championed the role of women in policing and the importance of women advancing to leadership positions in the profession. NAWLEE Executive Director Kym Craven took part in our working group sessions, and the organization invited PERF to present on this study at its May 2022 annual meeting.

PERF is grateful to the Motorola Solutions Foundation for its support of this project, which is part of our longstanding *Critical Issues in Policing* initiative. Career development and career pathways are among the foundation's primary focus areas, and the foundation's Executive Director, Karem Perez, has been particularly interested in the topic of women in police leadership. Karem and her team – Wesley Barden, Grants Manager; Alli Leach, Grants Administrator; and Kelly Kondry, Community Engagement and Volunteer Program Coordinator – were extremely supportive throughout this project.

This is the 45th *Critical Issues* report that PERF has published with support from Motorola – a truly

remarkable commitment to PERF and to the policing profession. We extend our thanks to Greg Brown, Motorola Solutions Chairman and CEO; Jack Molloy, Executive Vice President of Products and Sales; Jason Winkler, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer; Jim Mears, Senior Vice President; Tracy Kimbo, Chief of Staff, Global Enterprise and Channels; Monica Mueller, Vice President of Government Affairs; Shamik Mukherjee, Chief Marketing Officer; and Matthew Starr, Director of Government Affairs and Privacy Policy.

A project of this nature and scope requires a total team effort. Kevin Morison, PERF's Chief Program Officer, directed the project, wrote portions of the report, and edited the entire document. Senior Research Assistant Amanda Barber and Senior Research Associate Sarah Mostyn designed the survey and completed the preliminary analysis of the results. Amanda and Jessica Toliver, Director of Technical Assistance, organized and conducted the two working group sessions.

Senior Research Associate Kristen McGeeney completed a review of literature on women in policing and wrote up the results. Research Assistant Rachael Thompson analyzed and presented the survey data, wrote portions of the report, and proofread the entire document. Charlotte Lansinger, PERF's Executive Search expert, assisted with the reviewing of survey and focus group results, and she and Rachael presented preliminary findings at the 2022 annual meetings of both NAWLEE and PERF. Dave Williams laid out the report. Assistant Communications Director James McGinty oversaw production and distribution.

Thanks to the contributions of all these people, this report should advance the role of women in police leadership. We think it will help women who aspire to leadership positions but who may have faced obstacles in the past. It will also assist those police agencies that want to reap the benefits that come from expanding and diversifying their leadership ranks.

Progress on Women in Police Leadership, but Still a Long Way to Go

by Chuck Wexler

Penny Harrington – Portland, 1985.

Beverly Harvard – Atlanta, 1994.

Kathleen O’Toole – Commonwealth of
Massachusetts, 1994; Boston, 2004;
and Seattle, 2014.

Heather Fong – San Francisco, 2004.

THESE WOMEN POLICE CHIEFS WERE AMONG the first of the “firsts,” within their agencies and the policing profession. These four trailblazers – and others like them – rose to leadership roles that in the past had been held almost exclusively by men.

Today, thankfully, a female police chief is no longer a novelty. Women now serve as police chiefs and sheriffs in communities across the country. Among the six largest cities in the United States, women are currently police chiefs in three of them: New York City, Phoenix, and Philadelphia. And of the six most recent executive searches PERF completed in 2021 and 2022, half resulted in the selection of women

chiefs – in the Chattanooga (TN), Lincoln (NE), and Louisville Metro Police Departments.

So, while it used to be breaking news when a city named a woman as police chief, now it is much more commonplace.

But that is only part of the story.

Although women have begun to crack the glass ceiling and reach the top echelons of policing in many communities, they are still underrepresented at all levels of the profession. Only about 1 out of every 8 police officers in the United States is a woman, a figure that, amazingly, is largely unchanged over the past decade. And as rank increases, the percentage of women in policing declines. In 2016 (the last year for which comprehensive Bureau of Justice Statistics data on female chiefs and supervisors are available), just 10% of supervisors and 3% of chiefs were women. The number of female chiefs is slightly higher among PERF members. In a 2021 survey, we found that about 9.3% of PERF member chiefs were women, but that was up only slightly from the 2014 figure of 8.4%.¹

There are three female police chiefs in Northern Virginia. But between the chief and the officers, the women are just not there. They’re leaving for various reasons, but they’re still leaving.

**Maggie DeBoard, Chief
Herndon (VA) Police Department**

In the academy, they would ask us, “What are your career aspirations?” And I told them 31 years ago that I wanted to be the first female police chief. I don’t know why that came out of my mouth, but it did. I had no idea this is where I’d end up.

**Teresa Theetge, Interim Chief
Cincinnati Police Department**

1. Police Executive Research Forum (2022). “Police Chiefs Compensation and Career Pathways: PERF’s 2021 Survey.” Page 10. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/ChiefsCompensation.pdf>

I was fortunate. I had male mentors. I had female mentors. I had people who would tap me on the shoulder to offer assignments to me because they saw leadership potential in me. Mentorship is critical. It created opportunities that I didn't think were available to me.

Jeri Williams, Chief (ret.)
Phoenix Police Department

Understanding the Barriers ... and the Opportunities for Change

This project sought to answer a simple question: Why? Why are women underrepresented in the leadership ranks of most police agencies? What are the barriers to advancement for women, and what are the strategies for overcoming those barriers? What can women do themselves to enhance their opportunities for attaining leadership positions? And, more importantly, what can police agencies do to help women along their career pathways?

To help answer those questions, we reached out to hundreds of women in law enforcement and asked for their opinions and perspectives.

Based on these information-gathering efforts, plus a review of the literature on women in policing, several key themes emerged, which are examined throughout this report:

- **Women have a strong interest in leadership roles.**
- **Women don't feel they need special consideration in hiring or training standards.**
- **Agency culture is key.**
- **Opportunities – for assignments and training – are not always equal.**
- **Mentors play a crucial role for women looking to advance in policing.**
- **Men are a crucial part of the equation.**

As men, we play a vital role in enhancing our organizations by bringing more women into the profession, by getting more women excited to be in policing and excited to be going into leadership roles. As executives, we have to be intentional about this.

John Drake, Chief
Metropolitan Nashville Police Department

10 Action Items for Advancing Women in Police Leadership

Based on these and other themes, PERF developed 10 Action Items that police agencies can implement to help level the playing field and create more opportunities for women to advance in their departments. Some of these are steps that agencies can take right away, with little or no cost. Others will take more time and planning, and they may require dedicated resources or new spending.

But all of the Action Items will demand a commitment on the part of agency leaders – police chiefs, sheriffs, their command staffs, and other upper- and mid-level managers.

Implementing these Action Items will benefit more than the women currently in law enforcement and those who aspire to careers in policing. It will also benefit the agencies they work for. As many people – women and men – pointed out during the course of our research, increasing diversity at all levels makes police agencies stronger and more effective. Erika Shields, Chief of the Louisville Metro Police Department and a member of the PERF Board of Directors, summed it up during the discussion at the PERF Annual Meeting: “We’re stronger when we’re listening to people who don’t look like us. Diversity builds strength.”

Executive Summary

THIS REPORT EXAMINES WHY WOMEN ARE underrepresented in the leadership ranks of police agencies and outlines 10 ways that agencies can improve their gender diversity — and thereby become stronger and more effective — by helping more women advance to the highest levels of policing. It is based on a national survey, focus groups and other discussions, and a review of the literature on women in policing.

What the Research Says about Women in Policing

According to FBI data, women made up just 12.8% of full-time sworn officers in local police agencies in 2019, essentially the same share as in 2007 and only slightly higher than their 10% share in 1997. The numbers are even lower in state police agencies, where just 7% of sworn state troopers are women. Women's representation in local police agencies declines as rank increases: women account for just under 10% of sergeants or other first-line supervisors, 7.5% of intermediate supervisors, and fewer than 3% of chiefs of police.

An emerging body of research suggests that police agencies and the communities they serve can realize important benefits from greater gender diversity. For example:

- A 2017 study found that gender diversity in police agencies was associated with increased engagement in community policing initiatives, which can improve the agency's ability to mobilize resources,

problem-solve creatively, and assess and manage opportunities or threats.

- Research also suggests that women in policing contribute to increased positive outcomes for certain community members affected by crime and for the police agencies that serve them. For example, a pair of studies found that the presence of sworn female officers is associated with higher reporting, arrests, and clearance rates for sexual assault cases.
- Several studies have found that female officers tend to use less force than male officers and are less likely to be named in citizen complaints and supervisor reports of misconduct.

Despite these benefits, the percentage of women in policing has remained stagnant. Research suggests that while this partly reflects factors beyond the control of police executives (such as the size and demographics of the population), institutional factors — including agencies' recruitment and screening practices, physical fitness standards, internal culture and equity, workplace policies, and employee benefits—are more important.

PERF's Survey on Women in Police Leadership

PERF fielded a survey in February 2021 to gain a better understanding of women's experiences throughout their careers in law enforcement, specifically relating to promotions and leadership positions.

PERF sent the survey to 500 female police leaders, including both sworn personnel and professional staff members at all ranks and positions, and both active and retired individuals. PERF asked the initial recipients to share the survey with their female colleagues. PERF ultimately received 664 survey responses.

Respondents considered the opportunity to hold a variety of assignments to be the most important factor in their career development, closely followed by the ability to achieve a work/life balance. Other factors commonly cited as important were a supportive agency culture and regular promotional opportunities.

Barriers to Career Advancement

The survey asked respondents to name common barriers to career advancement for women in policing. The most commonly identified barriers included:

Internal cultural issues. These include a “good ol’ boys club” mentality in some places that favors men, especially in assignments and promotions; lack of opportunity or encouragement for some women to take certain assignments (for example, undercover, SWAT, bomb squad) that have traditionally been filled by men; a double standard that requires women to work harder for promotions than their male counterparts; and failure to value the unique attributes and benefits that women bring to policing.

External cultural issues. Some respondents said that a public bias against women police leaders persists in some areas. Society still expects women to handle a disproportionate share of family responsibilities, which can restrict their ability to pursue greater leadership opportunities.

Lack of female mentors and role models. Because there are relatively few women police leaders overall, the number of women available to serve as mentors and role models is limited, especially in small and medium-sized agencies.

Lack of childcare options and other family-friendly policies. Policies governing pregnancy, parental leave, scheduling, and other matters often limit new mothers’ ability to compete for and achieve promotions. These limitations can continue throughout someone’s career. Family obligations, especially for women with children, mean that some women may not be able to invest the time needed to pursue promotional opportunities and take on leadership roles.

Unequal access to leadership training opportunities. Agencies do not always provide women with the opportunities to attend the types of training programs that would enhance their leadership and management skills. In addition, women with significant family responsibilities may not be able to attend residential training programs that require students to be away from home for several weeks at a time.

Unfair promotional processes. Women who have not had opportunities for varied assignments and training opportunities will be at a disadvantage if those activities are factored into the promotional process. In addition, women with significant family responsibilities may have less opportunity to study for a written exam than other candidates.

Lack of respect and opportunities for professional staff. In most agencies, the majority of professional (non-sworn) staff members are women. Unlike with their sworn colleagues, professional staff do not always have clear career pathways or well established promotional processes.

Strategies to Increase Women in Leadership Positions

PERF’s survey asked respondents what steps they think police agencies could take to increase the number of women in leadership positions. Respondents considered a supportive agency culture the most important factor. Other factors singled out as important were expanded experience and training opportunities, formal mentor programs, and family-friendly policies. In contrast, changes to entry requirements and academy training were not considered very important.

A Closer Look at Three Issues Affecting Women in Police Leadership

To drill down further on some issues raised by the survey, PERF hosted two virtual working group sessions in late summer 2021 with 17 women police leaders. These sessions focused on three key issues: recruitment, promotions, and police culture and other issues that affect women.

Recruitment

For women to achieve greater representation in the leadership ranks, a larger and more consistent stream of women need to enter the profession in the first place. Working group participants identified a number of barriers preventing more women from entering policing.

For example, many agencies still rely on recruitment videos and other materials designed to sell excitement (officers repelling down walls, making forced entries, etc.) more than service. Participants suggested that marketing materials focus more on the everyday activities of officers – answering calls, conducting wellness checks, engaging the community, etc. – and emphasize the service aspects of the job.

In some agencies, many women applicants drop out of the process during initial screening and training. Participants said some screening tools are outdated and do not match the day-to-day requirements of policing. For example, many psychological exams were developed by, normed on, and often administered by white males; some exams have not been substantially updated since the 1950s.

Also, a disproportionate number of women still drop out of the hiring process because they cannot meet existing, state- or agency-mandated physical fitness standards. But these standards are not always validated as work-related and in compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requirements.

Promotions

Among the barriers to career advancement that women face, the promotional process itself is often high on the list. Participants in PERF's working group sessions identified three key issues.

First, women can be put at a disadvantage if written exams, assessments, and interviews are developed and carried out primarily by men, based on their experiences and perspectives.

Second, promotions are not always based on the full range of skills that supervisors and leaders need. In some agencies, the promotional process tends to reward “hard” policing skills — metrics such as number of arrests and breadth of experience. But women are sometimes excluded from the operational assignments that would allow them to gain broad experience.

Third, structural barriers can keep some women from entering the promotional process. For example, women reported having less time than men to study either during work hours or especially at home, where women still tend to shoulder a larger share of family responsibilities.

Police Culture and Other Issues That Affect Women

Respondents to PERF's survey identified a supportive agency culture as the most important factor in increasing the number and quality of women in police leadership positions. PERF devoted one working group session to specific issues related to agency culture:

Discrimination and harassment. Working group participants said that despite increased attention and training on the issue of sexual harassment, it remains a pervasive problem for women in policing. How agencies respond to allegations of discrimination and harassment plays a central part in defining the agency's culture.

Double standards. Survey respondents and working group participants frequently stated that women in policing often face different standards

than their male colleagues. For example, women who move into leadership positions frequently hear that they got there simply because they were a woman. And, because their achievements are not viewed as equal, women frequently over-compensate and work even harder to earn a promotion or other goal. This can deter or delay women from seeking a promotion until they feel they are “over-qualified.”

Tokenism. Working group participants cited two aspects of the tokenism that can affect women who aspire to leadership positions in policing. First is the tendency for women to be pigeon-holed to certain assignments, such as juvenile and family crime, sexual assault investigations, or administrative posts. Second, some agencies appear to set aside a certain number of leadership positions for women, so a woman cannot move into a higher leadership position until the woman already in that position moves on.

Lack of understanding and support. Police culture is not always supportive of issues that particularly affect women, especially on matters related to families. Working group participants noted that policing has not done a good job with flexibility in shift schedules, childcare resources, part-time or job-sharing opportunities, and other family-friendly policies.

Challenges facing professional staff. Non-sworn professional staff members, 60% of whom are women, provide critical services to their agencies and need to be included in any discussion of women in policing. Professional staff face several unique challenges. One is feeling like “second-class citizens”; when politicians, community leaders, and even some police executives speak about policing, they often focus exclusively on sworn personnel. Also, professional staff members in many agencies lack obvious career paths or a clear process for advancing in their careers, compared with their sworn colleagues. And for women executives who are professional staff, finding role models and mentors can be extremely difficult, since not many women fit that profile in many police agencies.

Perspectives from Other Police Leaders

At PERF’s 2022 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, staff presented the preliminary findings from the Women in Police Leadership survey. PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler then asked several women police chiefs and other leaders in the audience to offer their reactions to the study and their general observations on the state of women in police leadership. Below are some brief remarks from the ensuing discussion:

- “You hear these slogans and words like ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion.’ But diversity means nothing if a person is not included. There has to be room made for everyone to be at the table.” — Sheree Briscoe, Deputy Commissioner, Baltimore Police Department
- “Having opportunities is huge, and many of those opportunities were afforded to me by men. To the men in the audience I say, ‘You are relevant to this conversation.’ Don’t tune this out. Don’t check out because this is a ‘woman’s issue.’” — Erika Shields, Chief, Louisville Metro Police Department
- “For those in positions of leadership, you have the ability to change culture. . . . Let people know that they are valued – not only that they have a seat at the table but that you’re setting them up to succeed and that you value their input and their contributions.” — Danielle Outlaw, Commissioner, Philadelphia Police Department
- “I don’t think it’s always just a lack of opportunity. . . . [W]omen sometimes are really hesitant to take those opportunities. . . . So, if I had an ask, it would be to make sure that you are encouraging people from all backgrounds to take opportunities that maybe they don’t think they can necessarily do.” — Kathy Lester, Chief, Sacramento Police Department

10 Action Items for Improving Leadership Opportunities for Women in Policing

Following are 10 steps that agencies can undertake to improve gender diversity in their leadership ranks. Agencies could implement several of these right away, with few, if any, additional resources required. Others may take more time and some resources. But on the whole, these steps should not be a heavy lift for most agencies. While the 10 items are not necessarily presented in order of importance, fostering an inclusive culture is listed first because it is the foundation upon which all other reforms are built.

1. Police agencies should foster a culture in which all women feel included, valued, respected, and equal.
2. Agencies should make it a priority to hire more women at the recruit level.
3. Agencies should ensure that women are not being unfairly excluded from the hiring and recruit training process, especially with respect to physical fitness standards and psychological exams.
4. Agencies should create or expand family-friendly policies and resources that support women (and men) in balancing the demands of the job and the needs of their families.
5. Agencies should provide women members with equal opportunities to the full range of assignments, including in specialized units.
6. Agencies should ensure their promotional processes are transparent, equitable, and free of any biases that may have an adverse impact on women.
7. Agencies should provide women members with equal opportunities to attend training and other development activities throughout their careers.
8. Agencies should create or expand mentoring and career development programs geared toward women.
9. Efforts to develop and promote women should not be restricted to the sworn ranks only. Agencies need to make a concerted effort to hire, promote, and provide opportunities to women members of their professional staffs.
10. Agencies should collect and analyze data on women members in their department to identify possible disparities, obstacles to advancement, and strategies for improvement.

What the Research Says about Women in Policing

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT STATE of women in policing in the United States, PERF conducted an extensive literature review. We examined the research on the representation of women in policing and how it has changed over time. We also looked at what the research says about how women impact the profession and the benefits of gender diversity.

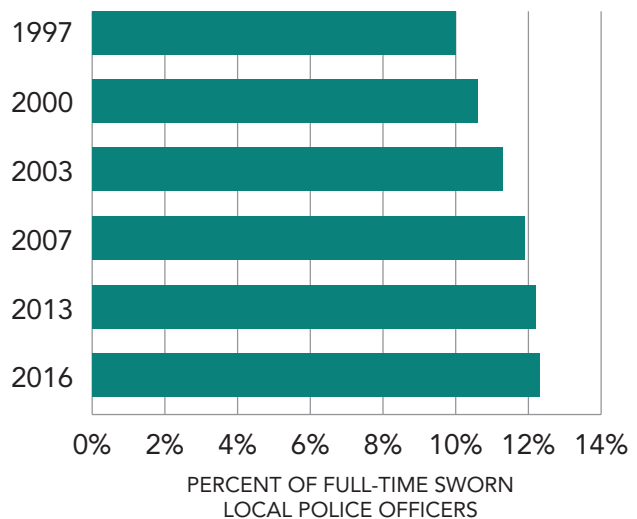
Women in Policing: By the Numbers

Relative to the population as a whole, women are dramatically underrepresented in the ranks of U.S. police officers. In 2019, 12.8% of all full-time sworn officers in local police agencies were women.² The percentage of female police officers is essentially unchanged since 2007 and is only slightly higher than in 1997, when the figure was 10% (Figure 1).³

The numbers are even lower in state police agencies. Nationally, just 7% of sworn state troopers are women, which represents only a slight increase from the year 2000, when 6% of state police troopers were women.⁴

Larger agencies tend to have greater representation of women officers in their ranks, although the percentages are still low. For example, in 2016,

Figure 1. Percent of full-time sworn local police officers who were female, 1997-2016



women accounted for more than 17% of the officers in agencies that serve populations of 1 million or more and approximately 15% among agencies serving populations of 250,000 to 999,999. But in the smallest agencies – those serving populations of less than 50,000 – women accounted for fewer than 1 in 10 officers nationwide (Figure 2).

2. Federal Bureau of Investigation. “2019 Crime in the United States.” Table 74: Full-time Law Enforcement Employees. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-74>

3. Hyland, Shelley and Elizabeth Davis. Local Police Departments, 2016: Personnel. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2019). <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd16p.pdf>

4. Van Ness, Lindsay. “Percentage of Women in State Policing Has Stalled Since 2000.” *Stateline*. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2021). <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/10/20/percentage-of-women-in-state-policing-has-stalled-since-2000>

Women's representation in local police agencies is low overall, and it declines as rank increases. Among agencies of all sizes, women accounted for just under 10% of sergeants (or other first-line supervisors), 7.5% of intermediate supervisors, and fewer than 3% of chiefs of police (Figure 3).

Again, these percentages were higher among agencies serving larger populations. For example, more than 8% of chiefs in agencies serving 250,000 or more residents were women, and those numbers have likely risen since 2016, when the BJS data were collected. Today, women serve as the chief executives of some of the largest police departments in the country. A 2021 survey of PERF members who are chiefs of police found that 9.3% were women, a slight increase from the 2014 figure of 8.4% (Figure 4).⁵

Figure 2. Sex of full-time sworn officers in local police departments, by size of population served, 2016

Population served	Total	Male	Female
All sizes	100%	87.7%	12.3%
1 million or more	100%	82.4	17.6
500,000-999,999	100%	85.4	14.6
250,000-499,999	100%	84.8	15.2
100,000-249,999	100%	88.0	12.0
50,000-99,999	100%	89.5	10.5
25,000-49,999	100%	90.4	9.6
10,000-24,999	100%	91.0	9.0
9,999 or less	100%	92.7	7.3

Figure 3. Percent of chiefs, intermediate supervisors, and first-line supervisors in local police departments who were female, by size of population served, 2016

Population served	Chief	Intermediate supervisor	Sergeant or first-line equivalent
All sizes	2.9%	7.5%	9.7%
250,000 or more	8.5	12.7	14.3
50,000-249,999	5.2	7.8	8.9
10,000-49,999	3.0	4.0	6.1
9,999 or less	2.6	5.0	6.1

Figure 4. Police chief gender, PERF surveys 2021 and 2014

Gender	2021		2014	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Female	32	9.3%	28	8.4%
Male	310	90.1	298	89.2
Prefer not to answer	2	0.6	8	2.4
Total:	344	100.0	334	100.0

Source: PERF member chief surveys, 2021 and 2014

5. Police Executive Research Forum (2022). "Police Chiefs Compensation and Career Pathways: PERF's 2021 Survey." Page 10. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/ChiefsCompensation.pdf>

Still, among agencies of all sizes, women make up a relatively low percentage of sworn personnel at all ranks. This is especially true among intermediate supervisors, command personnel, and chiefs, and especially in smaller agencies. And, despite the gains in some large agencies, there is little indication that this overall pattern is changing.

How Gender Diversity Can Benefit Police Agencies

An emerging body of research suggests that police agencies and the communities they serve can realize important benefits from greater gender diversity. Various studies have found that women tend to have strong interpersonal and communication skills, which increases community trust. Police agencies with more female officers often place a greater emphasis on community policing. Female officers are less likely to use force in certain situations than their male counterparts, and women are less likely to be named in lawsuits.

Here is a selection of research examining the benefits of gender diversity in certain key areas:⁶

Increased engagement in community policing.

A 2017 study found that gender diversity in police agencies was associated with increased engagement in community policing initiatives, such as conducting a citizens police academy, assigning officers to specific geographic areas where they can build relationships, encouraging creative and collaborative problem solving, and partnering with community groups to develop policing strategies.⁷ Specifically, the study sought to determine whether there was a directional relationship between gender diversity

and community policing – that is, did gender diversity increase as a result of community policing initiatives, did community policing initiatives increase as a result of gender diversity, or neither?

The study found that gender diversity is a strong predictor of community policing activity: higher numbers of women in policing roles increased their agencies' engagement in a larger number of community policing initiatives. The research suggested that women in policing contribute to the diversity of values and experience of the organization as a whole, increase representation of the community, and change the patterns of socialization and interpersonal interactions within the agency. These are all workplace characteristics that increase the ability of the police agency to mobilize resources, problem-solve creatively, and assess and manage opportunities or threats.

Positive impact on crime victims and other community members.

Research suggests that women in policing contribute to increased positive outcomes for certain community members impacted by crime and for the police agencies that serve them. A pair of studies found that the presence of sworn female officers is associated with higher reporting, arrests, and clearance rates for sexual assault cases.^{8, 9} The findings indicate that community members served by a police force with greater gender diversity are more likely to report crimes to the police and to engage in the criminal justice process.

Another study from 2021 examined data from more than 4 million traffic stops in North Carolina and Florida over a one-year period. It found male officers were 2.5 times more likely to conduct a

6. For an extensive review of the research literature on women in policing, see the Research Guide published by the 30x30 Initiative: <https://30x30initiative.org/what-works/>.

7. Schuck, Amie M. "Female Officers and Community Policing: Examining the Connection between Gender Diversity and Organizational Change." *Women & Criminal Justice* 27, no. 5 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2017.1303659>

8. Schuck, Amie M. "Women in Policing and the Response to Rape: Representative Bureaucracy and Organizational Change." *Feminist Criminology* 13, no. 3 (2018). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1557085117753668>

9. Meier, Kenneth J. "Gender, Representative Bureaucracy, and Law Enforcement: The Case of Sexual Assault." *Public Administration Review* 66, no. 6 (2006). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00653.x>

vehicle search but 10% less likely to find contraband than their female colleagues.¹⁰ The findings suggest that female officers are able to more accurately determine when a search should be conducted, which in turn mitigates the potential for negative interactions with citizens without sacrificing efficacy.

Less force, fewer citizen complaints.

Several studies have found that female officers tend to use less force than male officers and are less likely to be named in citizen complaints and supervisor reports of misconduct. In a 2021 study that analyzed millions of police-citizen interactions in Chicago over a three-year period, a team of researchers found that female officers made 7% fewer arrests and used force 28% less frequently than their male colleagues.¹¹ This distinction was even more pronounced in interactions involving Black citizens; female officers made 9% fewer arrests and used force 31% less frequently than male officers.

Another study examined characteristics of officers involved in citizen complaints of misconduct in a large police department in the southeastern United States. It found that “repeat offenders” (officers with five or more complaints over the 3-year period of the study) constituted 7.3% of the agency’s police force but were responsible for more than one-third of the agency’s total citizen complaints. All of the officers identified as “repeat offenders” were male.¹²

Male officers also account for a disproportionate amount of the payouts that police agencies make in excessive use-of-force cases. Although male officers

outnumber female officers by a ratio of approximately 4:1, one study found that payouts for claims involving excessive use of force by male officers exceed those involving female officers by a ratio of 23:1.¹³

Why are Women Underrepresented in Policing?

Even with the benefits gender diversity brings to the police workforce, the percentage of women in policing in the United States has remained stagnant at between 10% and 12% for the past two decades. Research suggests that a combination of environmental (external) and institutional (internal) factors contribute to this stagnation.

Environmental factors are those not directly in the control of police executives, such as the size and demographics of the population and overall participation of women in the labor force. However, institutional factors are those that agency leaders can exercise much more control over. These include recruitment and screening practices, physical fitness standards, internal culture and equity, workplace policies, and employee benefits. Evidence suggests that these institutional factors have a greater impact on female representation in policing than environmental factors.¹⁴

For example, while most police agencies require a physical fitness and agility test for employment, those agencies have 31% fewer sworn female officers than agencies without such a testing requirement.¹⁵ There has historically been a wide acceptance in

10. Shoub, Kelsey, Katelyn E. Stauffer, and Miyeon Song. “Do Female Officers Police Differently? Evidence from Traffic Stops.” *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 3 (2021). 755-769. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/ajps.12618>

11. Bocar A., Dean Knox, Jonathan Mummolo, and Roman Rivera. “The role of officer race and gender in police-civilian interactions in Chicago.” *Science* 371, no. 6530 (2021). <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abd8694>

12. Lersch, Kim Michelle, and Tom Mieczkowski. “Who are the problem-prone officers? An analysis of citizen complaints.” *American Journal of Police* XV, no. 3 (1996). <https://doi.org/10.1108/07358549610129613>

13. 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. <https://docplayer.net/21382159-Men-women-and-police-excessive-force-a-tale-of-two-genders.html>

14. Schuck, Amie M. “Female Representation in Law Enforcement: The Influence of Screening, Unions, Incentives, Community Policing, CALEA, and Size.” *Police Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611114522467>

15. 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 (2003): 237-277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611103254314>

policing that physical fitness is a prerequisite for job readiness. However, evidence exists that the *specific* fitness standards employed by many agencies are not predictive of job performance or required for the majority of job duties.¹⁶

A 2019 investigation by the Asbury Park Press and USA TODAY NETWORK New Jersey found that the rate of women failing police academy physical tests nearly tripled after New Jersey imposed a new physical testing standard for police recruits. Previously, recruits had their entire five months in the police academy to pass the physical test, so they had time to train if they were unable to pass the test upon

entering the academy. After the change, recruits had to pass the test after nine workouts, or roughly 2-3 weeks. Prior to the testing change, women and men failed the physical test at similar rates. But after the new standard went into effect, 31% of female recruits, but just 2% of men, failed the test.¹⁷

Agency culture is another institutional factor within the control of police leaders. A 2011 study conducted in southeastern Pennsylvania sought to understand why gender diversity in policing seemed to be stagnating. The study included surveys of both female officers and police chiefs in the region. The female officers were six times more likely than the

Saving a Seat for a Sister

An important addition to the research literature on women in police leadership comes from Nicola Smith-Kea and her 2020 doctoral dissertation: *Saving a Seat for a Sister: A Grounded Theory Approach Exploring the Journey of Women Reaching Top Policing Executive Positions*.¹⁸

The purpose of the study was to “gain an understanding of the complex journey of women to top executive policing leadership positions.” Dr. Smith-Kea researched and conducted face-to-face interviews with 21 women police executives to answer one overarching question: “What have been the experiences of women leaders in policing as they have progressed in the profession to executive rank?”. This allowed for a detailed examination of both the individual-level factors and the macro-level factors (larger group interactions, social structures, and institutions) that the women perceived as being critical to their leadership experiences.

Dr. Smith-Kea identified a core dimension, *Wanting Change*, as the main driver of women moving up through the ranks to leadership positions in their agencies. This core dimension was supported by three primary dimensions – *Making Opportunities*, *Taking Chances*, and *Being Visible* – which, she found, all played a key role in the women’s achievements. These personal journeys were impacted by four external dimensions – the policing, sociocultural, economic, and political spaces – that the women had to learn to navigate in order to advance in their careers.

Dr. Smith-Kea writes: “The women in this study are agentic and not simply following the lead. They are active, deliberate, and intentional participants in their own journeys, making critical and strategic decisions that can gain entry to policy decision-making that can result in sustainable change.”

16. Ibid, Lonsway 2003.

17. Ford, Andrew. “NJ police tests fail women recruits. Here’s how it hurts your safety and your wallet.” *Asbury Park Press*. Feb. 25, 2020. <https://www.app.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2019/07/29/new-jersey-failing-its-women-police-recruits/1819867001/>

18. Smith-Kea, N. D. (2020). *Saving a Seat for a Sister: A Grounded Theory Approach Exploring the Journey of Women Reaching Top Policing Executive Positions*. <https://aura.antioch.edu/etds/609>

police chiefs to say “police agencies here don’t seem very woman-friendly” as a reason for low gender diversity in the region.¹⁹ The female officers were about twice as likely as chiefs to answer that “women here don’t think they can get hired,” and the women said the primary reason was that “police agencies here don’t recruit women very proactively.”

19. Cordner, Gary, and AnnMarie Cordner. “Stuck on a Plateau: Obstacles to Recruitment, Selection, and Retention of Women Police.” *Police Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2011): 207-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611111413990>

PERF's Survey on Women in Police Leadership

TO CAPTURE THE CAREER EXPERIENCES AND lessons learned of women in law enforcement, PERF fielded a survey in February 2021. Through the survey, PERF sought to gain a better understanding of women's experiences throughout their careers in law enforcement, specifically as it relates to promotions and leadership positions.

PERF initially sent the survey to approximately 500 women police leaders, almost all of whom were PERF members. Survey recipients included both sworn personnel and professional staff members at all ranks and positions, and comprised both active and retired individuals. The survey was left in the field for approximately two months.

In an effort to gather as broad a range of perspectives as possible, PERF used a "snowballing" approach that asked the initial recipients to share the survey with their female colleagues. PERF ultimately

received 664 responses to the survey – about 160 more than the original distribution list.

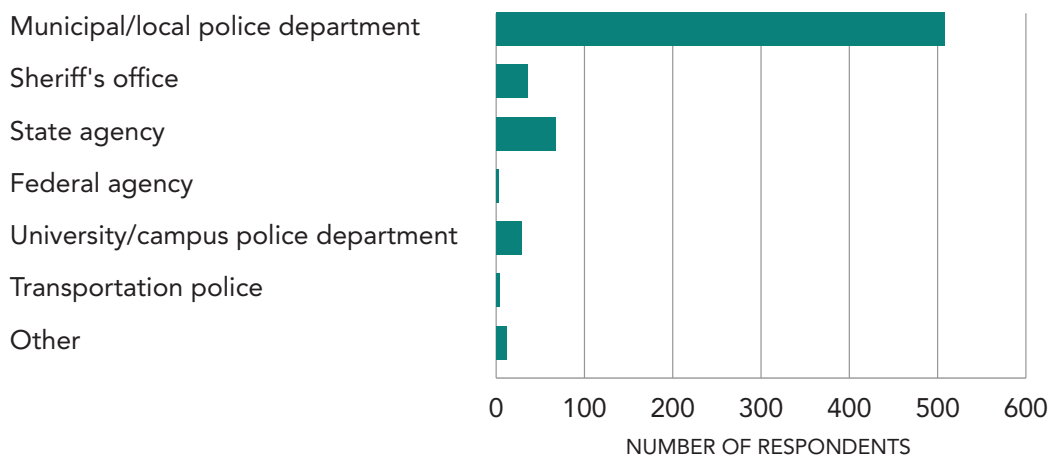
This chapter summarizes the findings of the survey. While the respondents do not reflect a nationally representative sample of all women in policing, the large number and diversity of respondents provide a broad cross-section of experiences and attitudes among female police personnel.

Respondent Demographics

Respondents to the survey included 88% sworn members and 12% professional staff. 89% were active police professionals at the time, while 11% were retired.

More than 77% of respondents worked for municipal police departments, with state agencies (10%), sheriffs' offices (5.5%), and campus police agencies (4.5%) accounting for most of the rest (Figure 5).

Figure 5. What type of agency do you work for?



Respondents came from a cross-section of small, medium, and large agencies, although most (61.5%) were from agencies with 500 or more total sworn officers (Figure 6).

Most of the survey respondents reported that women comprised either 10-14% or 15-19% of the sworn personnel in their agencies (Figure 7). This was slightly higher than the overall percentage of women in policing nationwide (about 12%). However, because the PERF survey skewed toward larger agencies, it is not surprising that more of the respondents came from agencies with a slightly higher percentage of female members.

Because the survey focused largely on leadership issues, it benefited from the overall experience levels of the respondents. More than 58% had worked in law enforcement for 20 or more years. Another 17% had 11 to 19 years of experience. Just 6.5% of

respondents had been working for fewer than 5 years (Figure 8).

Survey respondents included approximately 50 chief executives (chiefs, commissioners, sheriffs, etc.), plus a large number of deputy or assistant chiefs, commanders, and captains.

Career Aspirations and Development

Respondents to the PERF survey were asked about their career aspirations, both when they first entered policing and at the time of the survey. Respondents were also asked about the factors that have been important to their career development.

Only about 31% of the respondents said they entered policing with the goal of pursuing a leadership position. The remaining 69% were split almost evenly between those who said they had not planned

Figure 6. How many sworn personnel are in your agency?

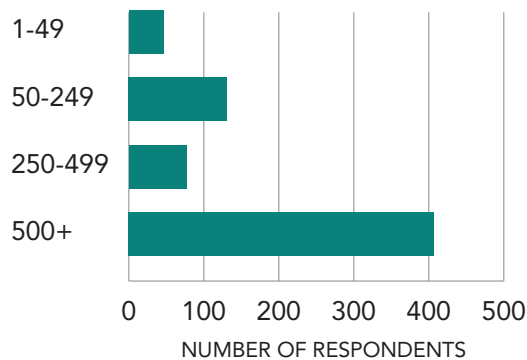
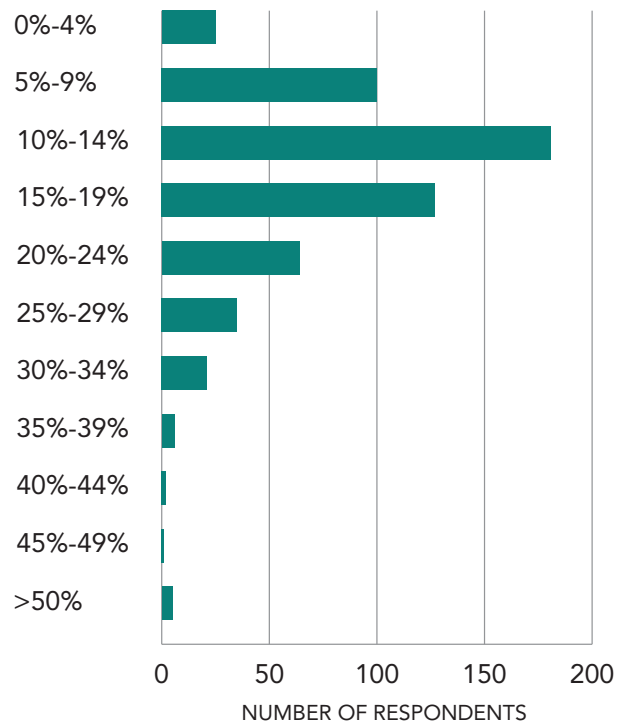


Figure 7. Approximately what percentage of the sworn personnel in your agency are women?



to pursue a leadership position and those who were not sure (Figure 9).

When considering the same question today, a much higher percentage of survey respondents said they now aspire to a higher leadership position than the one they currently hold. Just under 49% said they hoped to reach a higher leadership position; 21% said they did not, and 16% said they were unsure (Figure 10). Another 14% either were already the chief executive or were retired.

The survey also explored what factors women in policing think are most important to their career development. Survey respondents were given 10 factors to consider and asked to rank each one on a scale of 1 (Not at all Important) to 5 (Extremely Important).

On almost every factor, a large majority of respondents indicated that the issue was either

Extremely Important (5) or Very Important (4) to their career development (Figure 11). This suggests that there are a variety of factors – and not just one or two issues – that women in policing find important to advancing in their careers.

For example, 53% of respondents said the **ability to achieve a work/life balance** was Extremely Important, and 22% said it was Very Important. On another factor, **having a supportive agency culture**, 45% said it was Extremely Important; 24% rated it as Very Important. Approximately two-thirds of respondents said that **having mentors within their agencies** was either Extremely or Very Important.

Survey respondents also stressed the importance of women having access to professional development opportunities. For example, more than 51% said it was Extremely Important to have **the opportunity**

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Figure 8. How many years have you worked in law enforcement?

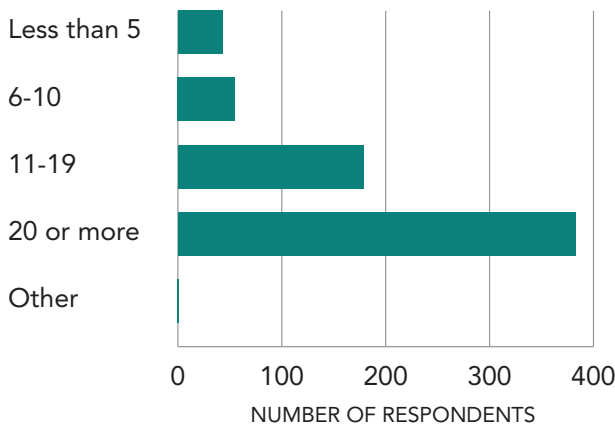


Figure 10. Do you aspire to a higher law enforcement leadership position than the one you currently hold?

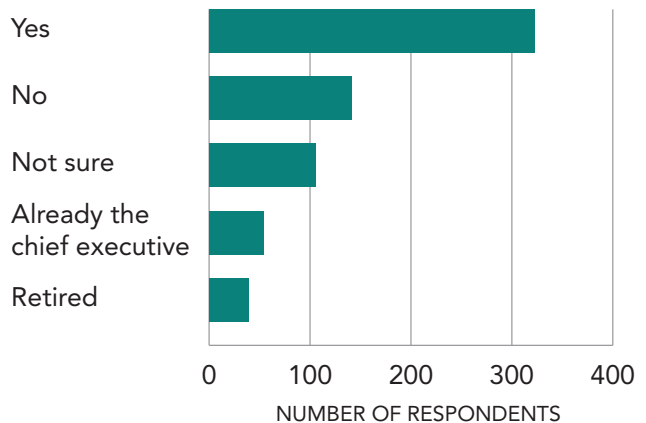


Figure 9. Did you enter law enforcement with the goal of pursuing a leadership position?

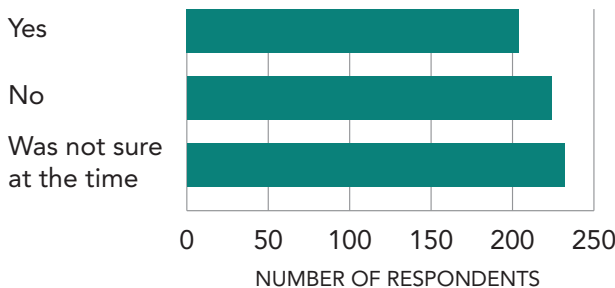
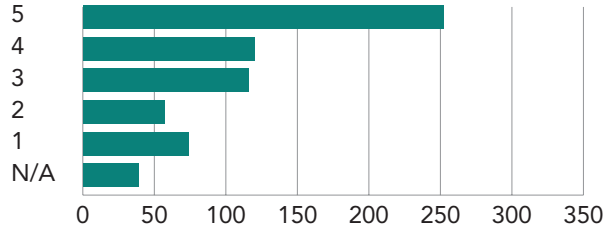


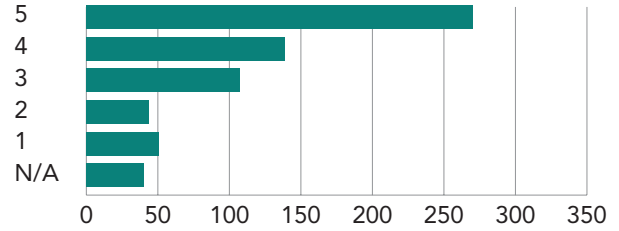
Figure 11. Factors in Career Development

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT and 5 being EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, please indicate how important the following factors have been in your career development.

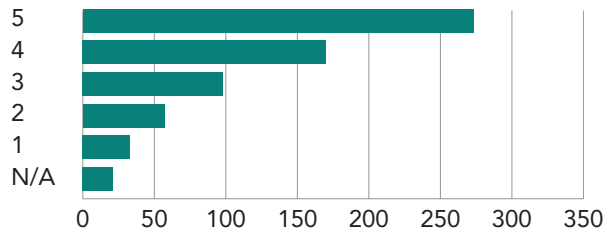
Opportunity to Pursue Additional Formal Education (Undergraduate/Advanced Degree)



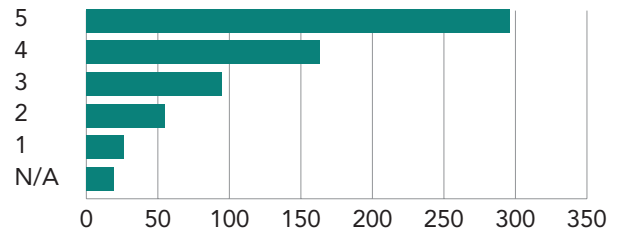
Specialized Leadership Training (SMIP, FBI National Academy, etc.)



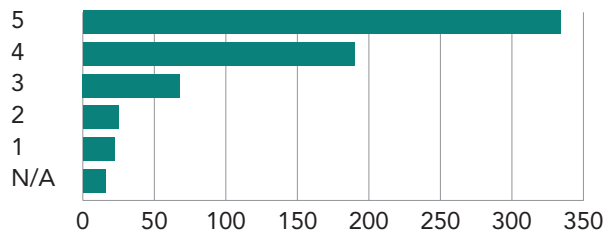
Mentors within My Agency



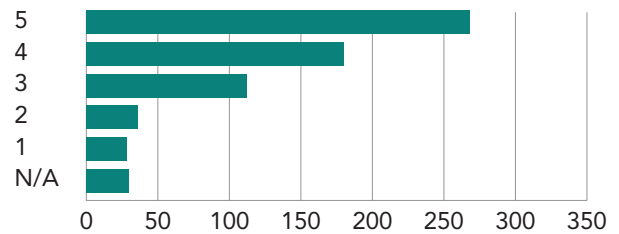
Culture/Support of My Agency



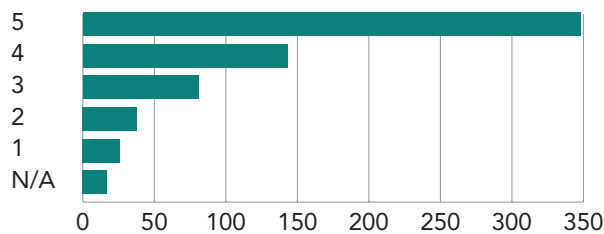
Opportunities to Hold a Variety of Assignments



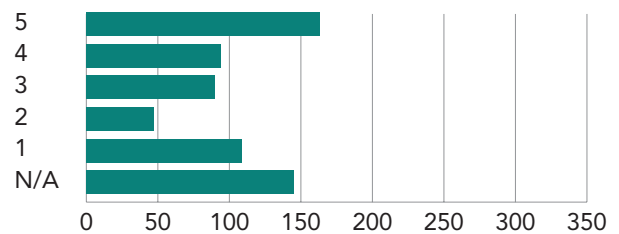
Regular Promotional Opportunities



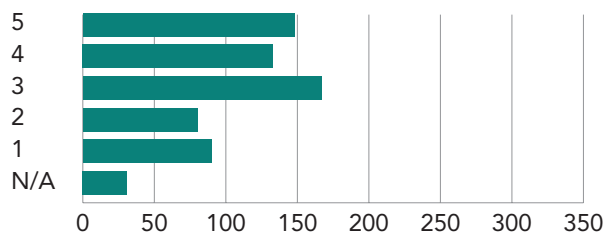
Ability to Achieve a Work/Life Balance



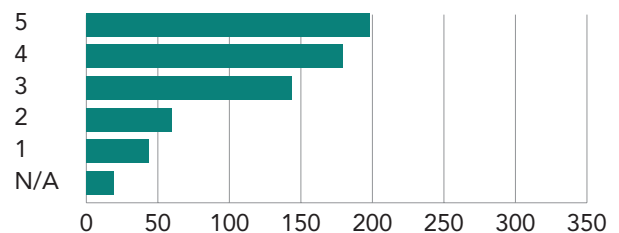
Availability of Maternity/Child Care Resources



Membership in Professional Organizations (PERF, IACP, etc.)



Informal Networking with Colleagues in Other Agencies



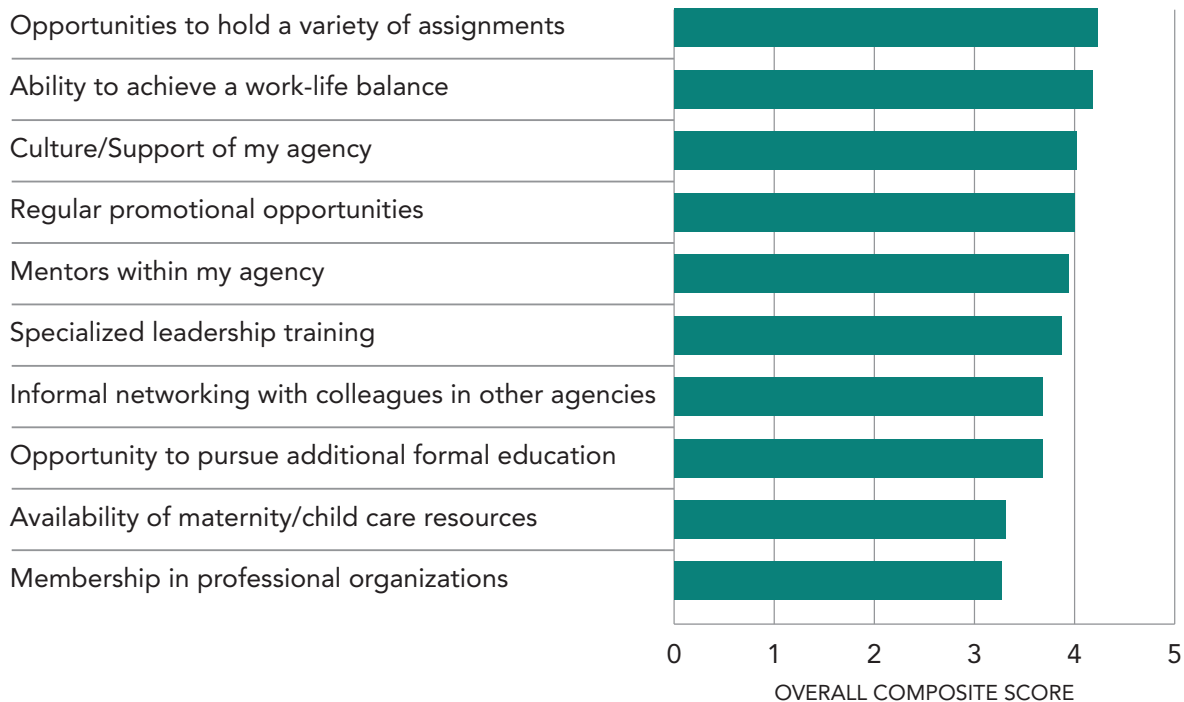
to hold a variety of assignments; another 29% said that was Very Important. Having access to **regular promotional opportunities, specialized leadership training** such as the FBI National Academy and PERF’s Senior Management Institute for Police, and the **opportunities to pursue additional formal education** were all cited as being important to the career development of women in policing.

The **availability of maternity and child-care services** was not rated as highly as many of the other factors, likely because these services did not apply to many respondents who do not currently have young children or don’t plan to start a family. Approximately 22% of respondents said this factor did not apply to them. However, among those women for whom this factor does apply, the qualitative responses indicated that childcare, in particular, is a major concern and a barrier to career advancement.

Two other factors that did not rank as highly for career development were **informal networking with colleagues in other agencies** and **membership in professional organizations**. Majorities of the respondents still considered these factors to be important, but the percentages saying they were Extremely Important or Very Important were lower than with other factors such as work/life balance, agency culture, and opportunities for promotion, training, and education.

Based on the individual responses to each of the 10 factors, PERF calculated an overall composite score for each factor (Figure 12). This analysis revealed that survey respondents considered the **opportunity to hold a variety of assignments** to be the most important factor in their career development. That was closely followed by the **ability to achieve a work/life balance**. Other factors that had an overall score of at least 4.00 were **having a supportive agency culture** and **regular promotional opportunities**. The other six factors all had composite scores of between 3.27 and 3.94.

Figure 12. Factors in Career Development – Overall Composite Score



Barriers to Career Advancement

PERF's survey asked open-ended questions about respondents' perceptions of the common barriers to career advancement for women in policing. An analysis of these qualitative responses found that the following were among the most commonly identified barriers:

Internal cultural issues. Respondents identified several cultural issues they felt were holding women back from achieving leadership positions. These included the following:

- There is still a “good ol’ boys club” mentality in some places that favors men in general and especially when it comes to assignments and promotions. Some respondents said that male command-level members were not always supportive of women attaining leadership roles.
- There is a lack of opportunity or encouragement for some women to take certain assignments (for example, undercover, SWAT, bomb squad) that would broaden their skill sets but which have traditionally been filled by men.
- Some women feel they face a double standard that requires them to work harder for promotions than their male counterparts.
- There is a degree of tokenism that some women who aspire to leadership positions face. For example, respondents felt that some agencies seem to limit the overall number of women in leadership positions and then follow a one-for-one model when it comes to promotions: when one woman retires or gets promoted, another woman will take her place in that position. Some respondents said these positions are often in areas such as administration, technical services, or community outreach. Women may not always be given equal opportunities for promotion to leadership positions, especially operational assignments, that have been traditionally held by men.
- Agencies don't always recognize and value the unique attributes and benefits that women bring to policing.

External cultural issues. Some survey respondents said, even today, there is still a public bias against women police leaders in some areas. Respondents also noted that society still expects women to handle a disproportionate share of family responsibilities, which can restrict their ability to pursue greater leadership opportunities.

Lack of female mentors and role models. Respondents said that because there are relatively few women police leaders overall, the number of women available to serve as mentors and role models is limited. This can be a particular problem in small and medium-sized agencies. And because there are fewer role models and mentors, women can miss out on valuable encouragement and guidance that are plentiful for men.

Lack of childcare options and other family-friendly policies. Many respondents singled out policies governing pregnancy, parental leave, scheduling, and other matters as limiting new mothers' ability to compete for and achieve promotions. And they said these limitations can continue throughout someone's career. Family obligations, especially for women with children, mean that some women may not be able to invest the time needed to pursue promotional opportunities and take on leadership roles. The lack of flexible and affordable childcare was cited by many respondents as limiting the opportunities of family members (women and men) who shoulder significant family responsibilities at home.

Unequal access to leadership training opportunities. Some women said their agencies did not always provide them the opportunities to attend the types of training programs that would enhance their leadership and management skills. In addition, training programs such as the FBI National Academy and PERF's Senior Management Institute for Police are residential programs that require students to be away from home for several weeks at a time. For women (and men) who have significant family responsibilities, these types of courses may not be an option.

Unfair promotional processes. Respondents reported that existing promotional processes can make it difficult for women to compete effectively. Women who have not had opportunities for varied

assignments and training opportunities will be at a disadvantage if those activities are factored into the promotional process. In addition, women who have significant family responsibilities (in addition to their policing career) may not have the same time and opportunity to study for a written exam that other candidates without such responsibilities would. Finally, some respondents said that promotional processes designed and administered largely by men can be inherently biased, especially for high-ranking positions that may involve more subjective criteria. Respondents said there should be more women represented on promotional boards and greater transparency about the entire promotional process.

Lack of respect and opportunities for professional staff. In most police agencies, the majority of professional (non-sworn) staff members are women. Unlike with their sworn colleagues, professional staff do not always have career pathways that are clear or promotional processes that are consistent and well established. Survey respondents said that professional staff do not always enjoy the opportunities and the level of respect to be considered for leadership positions.

Leadership positions are not attractive to some candidates. Finally, survey respondents noted that some people – both women and men – do not pursue leadership positions because they are not interested in them. Some people believe that with a promotion comes less operational police work and more administrative responsibilities. That shift in responsibilities is not attractive to some career police personnel.

Strategies to Increase Women in Leadership Positions

PERF's survey asked respondents what steps they think police agencies could take to increase the number of women in leadership positions. Respondents were given seven strategies to consider. They were asked to rank the importance of each one on a scale of 1 (Not at all Important) to 5 (Extremely Important).

Several factors – including a **supportive agency culture, expanded experience and training opportunities, formal mentor programs, and family-friendly policies** – were singled out as being important (Figure 13). Interestingly, two of the seven factors – **changes to entry requirements and academy training** – were not considered to be very important.

Based on the individual responses to each of the seven factors, PERF calculated an overall composite score for each factor (Figure 14). This analysis revealed that survey respondents considered a **supportive agency culture** to be the most important factor in boosting women in police leadership positions; it had a composite score of 4.67. Four other factors were grouped closely together, with composite scores ranging from 4.12 to 4.34. The other two factors – changes to entry qualifications and changes to academy training – received composite scores of only about 2.5.

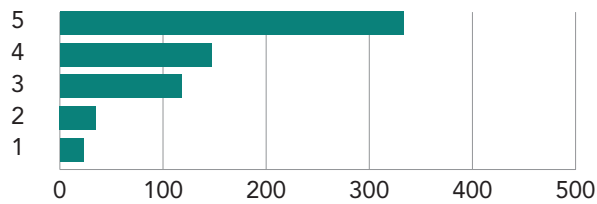
In addition to rating the seven factors presented in the survey, PERF asked respondents if there were other strategies they considered to be “very important” or “extremely important” to increasing women's representation in law enforcement leadership positions. This open-ended question elicited the following, more specific ideas:

- Executive coaching (in addition to mentoring)
- Programs to expose more women to careers in law enforcement (for example, internships or cadet programs)
- More creative and dynamic recruiting strategies (for example, targeting women's college sports teams)
- More flexible scheduling systems
- Increased support for childcare
- Generally make women police leaders more visible with the organization

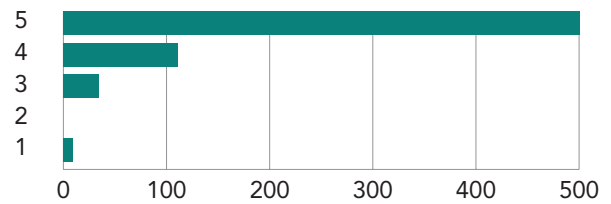
Figure 13. Strategies to Increase Female Representation in Leadership Positions

Considering the low percentages of women in law enforcement and especially in leadership roles, on a scale of 1 to 5 – with 1 being NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT and 5 being EXTREMELY IMPORTANT – please indicate how important you think the following factors are to increasing women’s representation in law enforcement leadership positions.

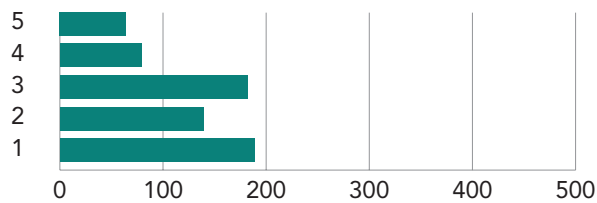
Family-Friendly Policies (e.g., Maternity Leave, Additional Child-Care Options, Opportunity for Part-Time Assignments, etc.)



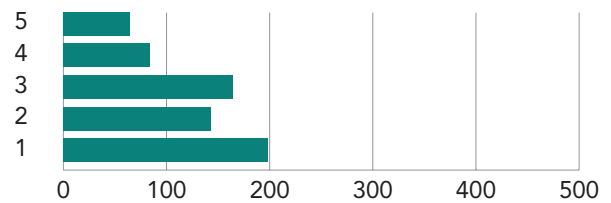
Supportive Department Culture



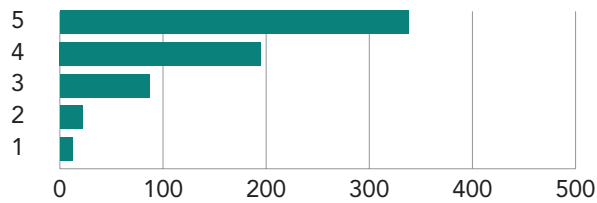
Changes to Entry Qualifications, Such as Physical Fitness Requirements



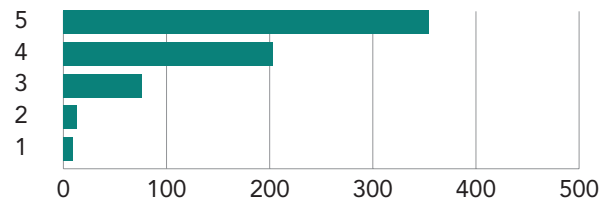
Changes to Academy Training



Continued Training Opportunities throughout Career



Ability to Secure a Variety of Assignments



Formal Mentor Programs

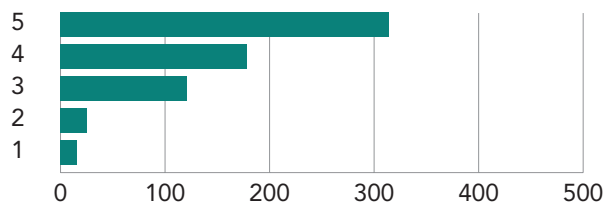


Figure 14. Strategies to Increase Female Representation in Leadership Positions – Overall Composite Score



A Closer Look at Three Issues Affecting Women in Police Leadership

TO DRILL DOWN FURTHER ON SOME OF THE issues raised by the survey, PERF hosted two virtual working group sessions in late summer 2021 with 17 women police leaders. The group included current and retired chiefs, a retired sheriff, and other women with various ranks and responsibilities, including both sworn officers and professional staff, a researcher, and an advocate for women in policing. These 90-minute sessions focused on three key issues:

- Recruitment
- The promotional process
- Police culture and other issues that impact women

Recruitment

Increasing the number of women in police leadership begins with increasing the number of women in policing overall. For women to achieve greater representation in the leadership ranks, there needs to be a larger and more consistent stream of women

entering the profession in the first place. As noted earlier, women represent only about 1 in 8 police officers in the United States, and that percentage has not increased substantially over the past decade or longer (see Figure 1).

Working group participants identified a number of barriers preventing more women from entering policing and opportunities to overcome those barriers.

Lack of Women's Visibility in Recruitment Efforts

In recent years, many police agencies have updated and improved their messaging around recruiting to make their presentations more diverse, realistic, and authentic. However, many agencies still rely on recruitment videos and other materials that are designed to sell excitement more than service. These are the videos that tend to show officers repelling down walls, making forced entries, or engaging in pursuits. And oftentimes, these videos feature men because they have traditionally dominated those roles.

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Agencies are still producing recruiting videos with people repelling from helicopters or jumping over eight-foot walls, which is rarely ever the case in the profession. They're not showing the other 90% of what officers do, which is checking on individuals and walking through the community and being known. Many of the recruitment videos we have are a huge barrier to getting diversity, including gender and racial and ethnic diversity, into the profession.

Nicola Smith-Kea, PhD.
Executive in Residence/Stoneleigh Fellow
Philadelphia Police Department

Participants in PERF's Working Group Sessions on Women in Police Leadership

- Jane Castor, Mayor, Tampa, Florida (former Tampa Police Chief)
- Kym Craven, Executive Director, National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE)
- Maggie DeBoard, Chief of Police, Herndon (VA) Police Department
- Teresa Ewins, Chief of Police, Lincoln (NE) Police Department
- Karen Gibson, Sergeant at Arms, United States Senate (former Lieutenant General, U.S. Army)
- Nola Joyce, Deputy Commissioner (ret.) Philadelphia Police Department
- Shelly Katkowski, Lieutenant, Burlington (NC) Police Department
- Tanya Meisenholder, Deputy Commissioner Equity and Inclusion, New York City Police Department
- Sylvia Moir, Chief of Police (ret.), Tempe (AZ) Police Department
- Celeste Murphy, Chief of Police, Chattanooga (TN) Police Department
- Blake Norton, Chief Strategy Officer, Philadelphia Police Department
- Sue Rahr, Director (ret.), Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (former Sheriff, King County, Washington)
- Ivonne Roman, Chief (ret.), Newark (NJ) Police Department
- Kimberly O'Brien, Assistant Sergeant at Arms, United States Senate (former Acting Deputy Chief, U.S. Capitol Police)
- Nicola Smith-Kea, PhD., Executive in Residence/Stoneleigh Fellow, Philadelphia Police Department
- Wendy Stiver, Major (ret.), Dayton (OH) Police Department
- Kristen Ziman, Chief of Police (ret.), Aurora (IL) Police Department



A lot of the recruiting videos that we are seeing today are promising. Often it is the larger organizations that tend to have the resources to produce these types of videos. Some organizations will never be able to create their own videos. That is a gap we need to fill by having general videos that can show women in policing in a more global way and then promote those videos on our websites to really accentuate women in policing.

Kym Craven, Executive Director

National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives

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Working group participants said this type of image of policing is a barrier to attracting not only women but also a more diverse applicant pool in general. They suggested that recruitment videos and other marketing materials focus more on the everyday activities of officers – answering calls, conducting wellness checks, engaging the community, etc. – and emphasize the service aspects of the job.

They emphasized that recruiting materials need to do more than just show more women. The materials also need to humanize the female officers by showing them with different backgrounds and in different roles outside of policing, including mothers, spouses, caregivers, volunteers, etc. The Madison (WI) Police Department uses this approach effectively with its *We Are the 28* recruitment video, which features officers having various family situations, backgrounds, hobbies, sexual orientations, and gender identities.²⁰ The experts told PERF that to attract more women into the profession, agencies need to ensure that women can relate to and see themselves in videos and other recruiting materials.

Barriers in the Hiring and Screening Process

Many agencies are finding it difficult to get women to apply for police officer positions in the first place. And once they do apply, high numbers of women in some agencies are dropping out of the process during initial screening and training. Participants in PERF's working group sessions said some screening tools are outdated and do not match the day-to-day requirements of policing. Their discussion focused on two areas: psychological exams and physical fitness standards.

Psychological exams. Working group participants said a lot of women (as well as racial minorities) are being dropped from the hiring process based on psychological exams. The police leaders pointed to a few critical flaws in the psychological screening process. In many cases, the exams were developed by, normed on, and often administered by white males. And some psychological exams have not been substantially updated since the 1950s.

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I say that women want these jobs. They're being weeded out systematically, whether intentionally or unintentionally, all along the process. That is limiting how many people go in, and then, of course, limiting how many eventually filter up to the top ranks.

Ivonne Roman, Chief (ret.)

Newark (NJ) Police Department

20. See <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=madison+we+are+28&docid=608029225924459318&mid=9DC19F667A813127D8969DC19F667A813127D896&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

Some Agencies Are Effectively Featuring Women in their Recruitment Videos

Grand Junction (CO) Police Department.

Features a woman relocating from the “big city” to Grand Junction so that she can be a part of the community.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=the+grand+junction+police+recruitment+video&view=detail&mid=31196921D2C08179E6C831196921D2C08179E6C8&FORM=VIRE>

Madison (WI) Police Department. *We Are the 28* uses real officers and the tagline “You could be ...” to showcase the different characteristics of women in the police department, including mothers, sisters, immigrants, veterans, people with advanced degrees, athletes, lesbian and transgender individuals, and others.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=madison+we+are+28&docid=608029225924459318&mid=9DC19F667A813127D8969DC19F667A813127D896&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, DC. *Like My Dad* features a female officer who followed her father’s footsteps into policing so that she could help others.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Z44MUmxEBw>



Metropolitan Nashville Police Department.

Meet Motors Officer Jessica Johnson features the first woman motorcycle officer in more than two decades. It shows Officer Johnson breaking barriers and succeeding in a male-dominated position, while maintaining the attitudes and values that attracted her to policing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWANHe2XuT4&t=14s>

University of Colorado at Boulder Police Department. While not geared exclusively for women, *Is This the Right Move?* uses a female narrator to emphasize the values of the police department and highlight the various assignments that women and men can get.

<https://www.colorado.edu/police/job-opportunities>

Screenshots of recruitment videos from the Madison (WI) Police Department (BELOW LEFT) and the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (BELOW RIGHT).



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Working group participants said these factors can create biases in the psychological screening process that can adversely impact both women and people of color. Former Newark (NJ) Police Chief Ivonne Roman told the story of one female applicant she was advising who failed the psychological screening process. The woman told Chief Roman that the psychologist who conducted her exam seemed hyper-focused on the fact that the woman had been a victim of domestic violence and felt that this created a bias against her.

Chief Roman had developed the Women's Leadership Academy to work with female applicants to prepare them for the physical fitness exam, but after learning that so many women were dropping out based on the psychological exam, she expanded her study group to include advice on psychological testing as well. She brought in a psychologist who advised the women on what the exam would likely entail and how to respond, or not respond, to various lines of questioning.

Dr. Tanya Meisenholder, the NYPD's former Deputy Commissioner of Equity and Inclusion, said an internal study of 15,000 people who went through the NYPD hiring process from 2014 to 2016, found that women were not qualifying at the same rate as men mainly because of physical fitness standards. But when it came to the psychological exam, both women and Black males were dropping out at higher rates. She said the NYPD is looking into additional training on implicit bias for the psychologists who administer the exam.

When she was chief of the Aurora (IL) Police Department, Kristin Ziman brought on a new firm to conduct psychological exams. The chief said she instructed the company to focus not only on potential disqualifiers but also on the personal qualities she wanted in her officers. "I want compassion. I want integrity. And I made it very clear that we can teach all the defensive tactics and the other things that you need to be a successful police officer, but I'm more concerned with those human qualities."

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The 30x30 Initiative: A National Effort to Advance Women in Policing

In a push to advance the representation of women in U.S. police agencies, a coalition of police leaders, researchers, and professional organizations have joined together as part of the 30x30 Initiative. The national effort seeks to achieve at least 30% representation of women in police recruit classes by the year 2030. Currently, women make up approximately 12% of all U.S. police officers.

The Initiative encourages police agencies to take the 30x30 Pledge, which it describes as "a series of no- or low-cost actions policing agencies can take to improve the representation and experiences of women in sworn positions in all ranks." Agencies that sign the 30x30 Pledge agree to:

- Take measures to increase the representation of women in all ranks of law enforcement;

- Ensure their policies and procedures are free of all bias;
- Promote equitable hiring, retention and promotion of women officers; and
- Ensure their culture is inclusive, respectful, and supportive of women in all ranks and roles of law enforcement.

As of June 2022, approximately 170 police departments, sheriffs' offices, and other law enforcement agencies had signed the 30x30 Pledge. The Initiative is led by the Policing Project at the NYU School of Law and the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE). PERF is among 17 project partners.

For more information, visit www.30x30initiative.org.

I was the commander of gangs and narcotics for over 10 years. And I never got into a pushup contest with a suspect. It's just not something that I needed to do, to have this massive upper body strength. And I was very effective by any measure when you compared me to another male commander.

Ivonne Roman, Chief (ret.)
Newark (NJ) Police Department

Be the Change: How the Fort Worth PD Is Helping Women Get Their Foot in the Door

Agencies continue to face challenges attracting women applicants to be police officers. And the women who do apply continue to face challenges in successfully completing the hiring and training process. The Fort Worth Police Department is trying to change that dynamic.

At PERF's 2022 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, Assistant Chief Julie Swearingin outlined how the department is reaching out to women who have applied to become officers and then helping them through the process.

Recently, I started a program called "Be the Change" (BTC). It's a recruiting program to increase diversity in the department, specifically with regard to female applicants. BTC is personal outreach that provides encouragement, physical and training support and is a readily available resource for questions and assistance.

The outreach begins from the time the applicant has expressed an interest in becoming a police officer and applies for the police department. Communication and outreach starts by ensuring they have a study guide for the written exam, and if successful, continue with physical training and workouts to prepare for the department's physical fitness test.

When I first started the program, I would personally call and leave the women a quick message if I was unable to reach them. The funny thing is that several called back thinking it was a prank. I would then follow up with an email introducing myself and to thank them for considering our department

for a law enforcement career. I use my position as the highest-ranking female on this department to connect and show support from the command staff. I shared my personal goal of recruiting females into the law enforcement profession as well as letting them know that they have my support and a team of strong women on the department to help navigate them through the hiring process.

I would also let them know that after they passed their written exam, we would be there to help them prepare for the fitness test. That is when the real work would begin! I would tell them, "Meet me Saturday at 9 o'clock and we're going to run and we're going to do push-ups and sit-ups, because I'm going to make sure you pass that test." So again, it is supporting the applicant from the very beginning until they are seated in the class and graduate from the academy.

After one of our civil service exams last year, we had 27 women pass the physical assessment test. That was an incredible feeling! These women accomplished what they set out to do and I was there every single day of the testing. There were plenty of smiles and high-fives!

We have had great success with BTC. In a recent graduating class, there were 16 women out of a class of 40. We even had a female class president, which we very seldom have for an academy class. We are getting more women in the door and will continue with our efforts and encourage them to promote and take on leadership roles.

Physical fitness standards. Participants in PERF's working group sessions said that a disproportionate number of women still drop out of the hiring process because they cannot meet existing, state- or agency-mandated physical fitness standards. One problem, the experts said, is that the standards – how many push-ups or sit-ups an applicant can do, or how fast they can run a set distance – are not always validated as being work-related and in compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requirements.

When she was Executive Director of the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, Sue Rahr was surprised to learn that a disproportionate number of women were disqualified from the statewide training academy because they could not complete the required 28 sit-ups in the prescribed time. (She had assumed that push-ups were causing the disparate wash-wash-out rate.) After analyzing the data, she learned that nearly every recruit, male and female, could complete 26 sit-ups. Since the purpose of all entry level fitness standard was to reduce the likelihood of injury during training, and there was no data to indicate that 28 versus 26 sit-ups reduced injuries, she changed the standard to 26. The number of women passing the physical fitness test increased by 30%. She urged agencies and academies to take a hard look at their standards, validate them as work-related and necessary, and then make the appropriate changes, which in some cases may be incremental tweaks like the adjustment to the sit-up requirement.

In some jurisdictions, the courts are intervening to ensure that women are being treated fairly in physical fitness exams. In 2021, for example, the Pennsylvania State Police settled a federal lawsuit filed by a group of women who failed to meet the physical fitness standards established by the State Police Academy. The State Police agreed to new fitness standards that are normed for age and gender and to establish a \$2.2 million fund to help women whose careers were impacted by the former tests.²¹

The Promotional Process

Among the barriers to career advancement that women face, the promotional process itself is often high on that list. Participants in PERF's working group sessions identified and discussed three key issues:

1. The promotional process is not always transparent or fair.
2. Promotions are not always based on the full range of skills that supervisors and leaders need.
3. There are barriers to some people, especially women, even participating in the promotional process.

Transparency and Fairness in the Promotional Process

In most agencies, the basic outline of the promotional process is usually well known and reasonably clear. Individuals seeking promotion generally must complete some type of written examination. That is often supplemented with assessment centers or similar exercises, plus in-person interviews.

However, some of the women PERF consulted for this project said that women can be put at a disadvantage if written exams, assessments, and interviews are developed and carried out primarily by men, based on their experiences and perspectives. Women felt there could be implicit (or even explicit) biases built into the system that could prevent women seeking promotion from receiving a fair chance. This could be exacerbated if the more subjective portions of the process, such as interviews, are conducted and evaluated mostly by men. Like many of the women who completed PERF's survey, the working group participants stressed that promotional processes must have ample representation of women at all stages of development, review, and evaluation.

In addition, they noted that some promotional processes give extra consideration to activities such as military service, which, like policing, is traditionally dominated by men. Working group members

21. Philo, Kaila. "Pennsylvania State Police Will Pay Up After Fitness Test Drew Bias Suit." Courthouse News Service. Apr. 13, 2021. <https://www.courthousenews.com/pennsylvania-state-police-will-pay-up-after-fitness-test-drew-bias-suit/>

How one Department Brought Fairness and Transparency to the Promotional Process

When she became chief of the Aurora (IL) Police Department in 2016, Kristen Ziman inherited a promotional process that was rudimentary, highly subjective, and prone to bias. Under that system, the greatest weight in the process was given to the promotional rating provided by an individual's immediate supervisor. That rating would go to members of the command staff, who could raise or lower the rating by up to 10 points and without providing any type of explanation. The secrecy and lack of justification behind some decisions left candidates confused and frustrated.

Under the new process, Chief Ziman left in the supervisor rating but provided just three options: 70=not ready for promotion; 85=promote with peers (which means the candidate is ready for promotion at the appropriate time); and 100=ready for immediate promotion. To prevent supervisors from giving out 100's to everyone, they are limited to giving out only one top ranking.

Then, over a three-day period, the department assembled command members

in the same room to review the promotional packets, including supervisor ratings. Supervisors present the candidate and explain their ratings. The floor was then opened for comments from other individuals who have worked or interacted with the candidate. Each comment must be substantive and attributed to the person who made it.

The department uses polling software that allows each reviewer to provide their own rating. The composite score becomes the individual's new rating number. When promotional candidates are informed, they are given not only their overall score about also any comments from command members. Candidates for promotion have the right to appeal, but only if there is inaccurate information in the packet.

While individuals may not always be satisfied or pleased with the decision, they at least have documentation about how the process was handled and valuable feedback should they go for a promotion in the future.

said agencies should consider more gender-neutral factors, such as a college degree or knowing another language – when providing extra credit on a promotional exam.

Evaluating the Full Range of Leadership Skills

Working group participants noted that in some agencies, the promotional process tends to reward “hard” policing skills, metrics such as number of arrests and breadth of experience. But because women are sometimes excluded from the operational assignments that would allow them to gain broad experience and develop a range of skills, they can be at a disadvantage when it comes time for promotion.

The working group members also noted that promotional processes don't always factor in leadership skills and potential. These tend to be less tangible and

harder to quantify than traditional activities such as arrests, investigations, warrants served, and the like. And if the promotional process is directed largely by men, it might be difficult for them to recognize and appreciate the presence of skills they may view as “softer” and have more trouble quantifying among female candidates for promotion.

Even when leadership training and skills are factored in, some participants in the working groups noted (as did survey respondents) that women are not always given the opportunities to attend advanced training classes such as PERF's Senior Management Institute for Police (SMIP) or the FBI National Academy. Women miss out on valuable opportunities to develop their skills and increase their professional networks when they can't attend these residential-based programs.

We often promote based on competency. So the great cop who makes a lot of arrests and has the highest numbers is the person that's getting promoted. He's a rock star, right? Well, as we all know, you can rock the numbers and not have any leadership qualities whatsoever.

Kristin Ziman, Chief (ret.)
Aurora (IL) Police Department

What Keeps Some Women from Seeking Promotions

The working groups also discussed why some police personnel – in particular, women – don't even try for promotion. Of course, there will always be a certain percentage of officers who don't want to be sergeants, or sergeants who don't want to be lieutenants, etc. However, the working group members said there can be structural barriers that keep some women from entering the promotional process.

Dr. Tanya Meisenholder, former Deputy Commissioner of Equity and Inclusion for the NYPD, said the agency identified groups of sergeants, both female and male, and asked about their interest in and motivation for taking the next civil service exam for lieutenant. The NYPD sent out surveys and conducted focus groups. What they found, according to Dr. Meisenholder, is that for women, the decision not to seek a promotion has less to do with motivation and more to do with lifestyle issues. For example, women reported having less time than men to study either during work hours or especially at home, where women still tend to shoulder a larger share of family responsibilities.

Another issue that the groups discussed was how, when people get promoted, they typically lose their seniority when it comes to scheduling. Newly promoted individuals almost always get assigned to

new, usually less desirable shift schedules. This can discourage women (and men) with significant family responsibilities from entering the promotional process because they don't want to risk disrupting their schedules.

Police Culture and Other Issues Impacting Women

Throughout our research on women in police leadership, the issue of culture came up repeatedly. Respondents to PERF's survey identified a supportive agency culture as being the most important factor in increasing the number and quality of women in police leadership positions (see Figure 14).

But as important as culture is to advancing women in policing, it is something that can be difficult to define and address. Many of the women who contributed to this project referred to culture in terms of the male-dominated "good ol' boys club" mentality that many of them and their peers have had to endure. Breaking through that culture is seen by many women as critical to achieving gender diversity and equality in policing and police leadership.

To try and make the concept of police culture more tangible, PERF devoted one working group session to looking at specific issues impacting women

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I've been very, very deliberate with the women I have mentored to demonstrate to them that they can be female. They don't have to be just like the guys. In fact, it's better if you are not just like the guys, because you bring a lot of value to the field that you're about to enter.

Kimberly O'Brien, Assistant Sergeant at Arms
United States Senate

The National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives

For women in law enforcement trying to navigate the promotional process, having a mentor to help them understand the process and guide them through it can be critically important. PERF's survey found that women in policing consider having a mentor to be one of the key factors to helping them advance in their careers.

A growing number of large police agencies are establishing mentorship programs for women, but many agencies, especially small and mid-sized departments, do not have the resources or the female representation to provide meaningful mentorship opportunities to up-and-coming women in their agencies. That is where the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE) can step in.

NAWLEE is a national non-profit organization created to address the unique needs of women holding senior leadership positions in law enforcement and those who

aspire to those positions. NAWLEE holds an annual conference, conducts other training sessions on leadership issues, and provides a forum for women police leaders to exchange ideas and information.

In addition, NAWLEE provides mentoring opportunities for women at all stages of their careers, pairing up women police leaders with other women who are seeking to advance their careers. According to Kym Craven, NAWLEE's Executive Director, many women actually want a mentor who is outside their own agency. This allows them to be more candid with their mentor, and the mentor can provide experiences and perspectives that are broader in scope.

NAWLEE also has programs designed to help senior managers, both men and women, better understand how to mentor and retain women in their organizations.

For more information about NAWLEE, visit www.nawlee.org.

For most of the organizations that are talking to NAWLEE about formalizing a mentoring program, the feedback that we receive from the women in the organization is that they prefer to have mentors that are outside of the organization.

What NAWLEE has found, except for the very largest organizations, is most of the women want mentors that are outside of their organization. There are multiple reasons for wanting an outside resource. If someone is seeking a mentor, they don't want to expose themselves and hurt a potential promotional opportunity. Women are worried that if someone learns of how they may be needing assistance, whether it be at home or with the job. We talk so much about stopping the stigma, but it's still there, and people worry about that.

Another reason that women give for wanting an outside mentoring program is that they actually want to leave their organization and try to get with another organization that has more opportunities.

**Kym Craven, Executive Director
National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives**

It's just stunning to me that in this day and age, some of these guys will still do this type of thing [sexual harassment]. What's even more worrisome is that in several classes, everybody in the class knew what was going on and nobody said anything about it. I just think that we have worked so hard to change the culture, and yet that behavior persists.

Sue Rahr, Director (ret.)

Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission

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that fall within the category of culture. The group's discussion focused on five general areas:

- Discrimination and harassment
- Double standards
- Tokenism
- Lack of understanding and support (especially on family-related matters)
- Challenges facing professional staff

Discrimination and Harassment

Participants in the working group described various examples of discrimination and harassment they encountered throughout their careers, and the challenges women face in responding. One participant described how, early in her career, someone had spray-painted an obscene image on her locker and left pornography in a shared desk drawer, and study

groups did not share with women all the guides for taking promotional exams.

Working group participants said that despite increased attention and training on the issue of sexual harassment, it remains a pervasive problem for women in policing. Sue Rahr, retired Director of the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, said sexual harassment complaints were one of the most common reasons recruits, almost exclusively men, were dismissed from the academy.

How agencies respond to allegations of discrimination and harassment plays a central part in defining the agency's culture, according to the working group participants. Several women said that for years, the expectation was that, unless physical contact was involved, women in policing were expected to have thick skin and just shrug off instances of harassment. Many said that women who made complaints often faced backlash from peers for being weak, or they worried that future career opportunities would be jeopardized.

For my generation, it was – and it sounds sick to say – almost a badge of honor [to have endured sexual harassment]. It was almost like, “Look what I endured.” The feeling was, “if it didn't crush me, then it wasn't sexual harassment.” I used to always fill out those surveys: “Have you been sexually harassed?” “No, of course not. Look, I'm still here!” And then the survey got more detailed: “Has this ever happened to you? Has that happened?” And I'd reply, “Well yeah, all those things happened to me. But that wasn't sexual harassment because it didn't get me down.” And sadly, women who did report were sometimes viewed by peers as weak, as not being “woman enough” to put up with it. That's bad.

Karen Gibson, Sergeant at Arms

United States Senate

(speaking of her 33-year career in the U.S. Army)

The one thing that I found really effective in my position in Dayton with my male leaders was challenging them to think about how their daughters or their wives would experience the work environment. Just raising issues about things that they felt were minor – jokes and behaviors in the workplace, or things that some of the male coworkers said – got them thinking differently.

**Wendy Stiver, Major (ret.),
Dayton (OH) Police Department**

Working group participants suggested that investigations of serious claims of harassment and discrimination need to be handled outside the agency where the complaint was made. Even with the best of intentions, human beings cannot be totally objective toward people they know and work with. Moving these investigations to an outside entity not only can provide a better and fairer process for the complaining party. It also sends the message that the agency's culture does not tolerate discrimination and harassment and its leadership takes these complaints seriously.

Double Standards

A frequent observation among both survey respondents and working group participants was that women in policing often face a different set of standards than their male colleagues. This double standard can take a few different forms.

- Women's accomplishments are not always viewed as equal or deserved. Women who move into leadership positions frequently hear that they got there simply because they were a woman and not because they earned the promotion.
- Because their achievements are not viewed as equal, women frequently over-compensate and work even harder to earn a promotion or other goal. This can deter or delay women from seeking a promotion until they feel they are "over-qualified."
- Women are sometimes held to a different standard of conduct than men are, and when women do make mistakes, they are viewed more harshly than similar transgressions made by men. Working group participants said that when a man and a woman make the same mistake, the woman's mistake is often amplified, and in some instances, mistakes are attributed to the fact that the person is a woman.

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Because I was never given the credit that I thought I earned, I over-compensated. I had two master's degrees, Ted Talks, I'm working on a PhD, but why? Because my accomplishments, though they mirror a man's, are not perceived as being equal.

**Ivonne Roman, Chief (ret.)
Newark (NJ) Police Department**

I was always like, "I've just got to make sure that I earn it – that if I pursue this position that people won't say that I am not worthy, so I have to do all of the things required – and more." Whereas a lot of men are just like, "Yeah, I've got this."

**Kristen Ziman, Chief (ret.)
Aurora (IL) Police Department**

Research and our collective experience tell us that if there are 50 things that an individual has to do in order to demonstrate readiness or the minimum qualifications to seek promotion, women will do 50 or 53.

**Sylvia Moir, Chief (ret.)
Tempe (AZ) Police Department**

The Glass Cliff Phenomenon

A term coined by two British professors in 2004, the “glass cliff” refers to the tendency to promote women to leadership positions during challenging times or times of crisis when the risk of failure is high.²² The idea is that women in these situations may be set up for failure. The researchers examined the 100 companies in the Financial Times Stock Exchange and found that women in these perilous situations were like standing on the edge of a cliff from which they will fall off if they fail. The term is an

offshoot of “glass ceiling,” which refers to the perceived limit on how high a woman can rise in an organization.

Under the glass cliff scenario, organizations that promote women into leadership positions still look progressive even if the leader fails. It also provides them cover to appoint a man to the position if the woman fails. While it is unclear the extent to which the glass cliff occurs in policing, some people believe it could occur subconsciously.

I think this whole “glass cliff” phenomenon may be true. When there’s a difficult time and work that has to be done, people – the boss’s bosses – may tend to look to those who are more expendable, like woman and people of color, and put them in those positions that are extremely difficult and fraught with the danger of failure. If they fall off the cliff, “Oh well, too bad.” That’s kind of harsh, but I think some of that thinking, even if not conscious, is out there in policing.

**Nola Joyce, Deputy Commissioner (ret.)
Philadelphia Police Department**

Men just don’t get judged the same way. Often bad behavior is ignored or dismissed. It’s okay if they do something stupid or step in it, and people are apt to say, “Oh, well, that’s just so-and-so.” But when you’re a female, the standards are different.

**Blake Norton, Chief Strategy Officer
Philadelphia Police Department**

If a male had failed at being police chief, people would have said, “Oh, such-and-such couldn’t do the job.” If I had failed, then the response would have been, “I told you a woman couldn’t do it!” So I took the responsibility of not only being chief, but being a female chief very seriously. Sometimes you do have to run faster and jump higher to reach the same place.

**Jane Castor, Mayor, Tampa (FL)
(Former Chief, Tampa Police Department)**

22. For background, see Kagan, Julia. “Glass Cliff.” *Investopedia*. Apr. 24, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/glass-cliff.asp>

Tokenism

Working group participants cited two aspects of the tokenism that can affect women who aspire to leadership positions in policing.

First is the tendency for women to be pigeon-holed or locked-in to certain assignments – ones that are considered the “woman’s positions” in the agency. Typically, these are in areas such as juvenile and family crime, sexual assault investigations, or administrative posts. In some respects, this can be a self-fulfilling prophecy as women move up in the

organization: if they were steered into these areas as they came up through the ranks, women end up in those same commands when they are promoted to management and executive level positions.

Second is the feeling that some agencies set aside a certain number of leadership positions for women. Under this type of informal quota system, a woman cannot move into a higher leadership position until the woman already in that position moves on.

The extent to which these practices occur is difficult to measure. Still, there is a perception among some women police leaders that their opportunities are limited by this type of tokenism.

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I put in a proposal when I was in the Sheriff's Office, before I had higher rank, to create "part-time" positions that officers could apply for after they had served an agreed upon number of years in patrol, perhaps 2-5 years. I suggested 10-hour shifts on patrol on Friday and Saturday nights to save money and better match staffing to calls for service. (Calls for service always surged on Friday and Saturday nights) I proposed that officers could waive a full-benefit package in favor of a reduced package, so this model would create significant cost savings. I hit a brick wall because it required a legislative change to the state retirement system and no one was willing to fight for it.

I have since learned there was absolutely no reason that change could not have been made if the political will had been there. The WA State Legislature is just now, finally considering this proposal in the upcoming 2023 session, 10 years after my retirement.

When I was a new mom, with two kids, I would have given my left arm to be able to do that even for just a year to get over the hump of sleep deprivation that comes with parenting young kids. I would have loved my job more. Because for me, when I had little kids at home, I became a lousy employee, because I was chronically sleep deprived and just didn't have the bandwidth to do both things well. And I've known so many women over my career who also became poor employees because of the staggering burden of parenting small children. Many never returned to being good employees. Once they learned to game the system to survive, some just continued down that track. I was blessed because I finally figured out a way to hire a nanny so I could do both parenting and policing well. But not every woman has the financial ability to do that. We shouldn't put men or women with young kids in that position if we care about the long-term health and well-being of officers and their families.

Sue Rahr, Sheriff (ret.)
King County, Washington

The San Diego Police Department's Childcare Solution

Excerpted from the Community Policing Dispatch, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, June 2022

Four years ago, Anne Bosanac knew that childcare for the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) needed an overhaul. She is a member of the Board of Directors for the San Diego Police Officers Association and is co-founder of Emissary Relations. At that time, childcare was inaccessible and expensive, and childcare workers were paid very little. It was not a sustainable model, especially for police officers on a shift work schedule. Anne's goals were simple: make childcare accessible and affordable for officers and increase pay for childcare employees.

Four years later, she will see her vision come to life: All her goals have been achieved. A childcare center has been customized for the

SDPD. It will be open from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. and for emergency childcare to accommodate different shifts. It will also be open holidays. The center will charge 50 percent less than market rate, and employees will be paid 15 percent above market rate.

How is this possible? This arrangement has been funded through public and private partnerships: San Diego is partnering with [KinderCare](#), a well-known childcare provider in the area. In addition, funds will come from both the government and private philanthropists. Anne's hard work has paid off and is now helping other departments across the county formulate customized plans for their departments.

For the full article, go to https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/06-2022/SanDiego_Childcare_Solutions.html.

San Francisco's Family Friendly Work Plan

Lincoln (NE) Police Chief Teresa Ewins spent more than 26 years of her career with the San Francisco Police Department. She described how the city's Family Friendly Workplace Ordinance (FFWO), which took effect in January 2014, impacted the police department. The ordinance gives employees the "right to request flexible or predictable working arrangements" to assist with caregiving responsibilities for a child, a family member with a serious health condition, or a parent aged 65 or older.²³ The FFWO applies to all employers with 20 or more employees, including public agencies like the police department.

"San Francisco implemented a family friendly work plan, and basically you could apply to have a flexible schedule. Obviously, you're not going to get paid if you don't do the specific amount of time in the pay period, the 80 hours. But you get more say in when that's going to happen.

"The ordinance impacted us in positive as well as negative ways. On the positive side, it gives people an option, especially new parents. And it's men and women. However, some people took advantage of it who probably didn't qualify. Many of them just had an issue with a supervisor. But in most cases, you get about six months to be able to work through your family friendly work plan."

23. For more information about the FFWO, see <https://sfgov.org/olse/sites/default/files/FileCenter/Documents/12080-FFWO%20FAQs%20Final%200725.pdf>.

I've seen instances in which women are not given opportunities because they had families. I once heard a deputy chief say, "You're pregnant because you want to be off the street," that kind of attitude.

**Teresa Ewins, Chief
Lincoln (NE) Police Department**

I had a lot of hesitation when I came back from having my baby. But I realized that I did have a lot of support. I was fortunate to work in a culture where I was given opportunities to go home in the middle of a shift, to feed the baby and pump and do all those things in private.

**Shelley Katkowski, Lieutenant
Burlington (NC) Police Department**

I had to pump breast milk in the precinct and while driving to calls, I even had one of my male partners hold the case with the pump and accessories. To this day he doesn't let me forget about that. Having these attitudes, these supports and resources in place, is something that we all want.

**Celeste Murphy, Chief
Chattanooga (TN) Police Department**

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Lack of Understanding and Support (especially on family-related matters)

There was an extensive discussion of how the police culture is not always attuned to or supportive of issues that affect women, especially on matters related to families.

For example, a few working group participants said they attempted to hide their pregnancies because they didn't want to be taken off the streets before they absolutely had to or looked at differently by their peers. One participant noted that some of her male colleagues referred to her pregnancy as a "condition."

Another told the story of a female captain who had been struggling to start a family and wanted to begin in vitro fertilization. She was told by her command that they'd really appreciate if she waited another 7 or 8 months because they had a lot of important events going on.

Other women, however, related how their agencies – either formally or informally – supported them as they were starting families, but they acknowledged that such practices were not universal.

Overall, the working group participants noted that, unlike other professions such as nursing and the military, policing has not done a good job with flexibility in shift schedules, childcare resources, part-time or job-sharing opportunities, and other family-friendly policies that could benefit not only women but also men, especially single parents.

Challenges Facing Professional Staff

While much of the research on women in policing focuses on sworn law enforcement personnel, non-sworn professional staff members provide critical services to their agencies and need to be included in any discussion of women in policing. In 2016, professional staff accounted for one-third of all full-time employees in state and local law enforcement agencies and almost 60% of the part-time employees.²⁴ And women make up 60% of professional staff employees.²⁵

24. Hyland, Shelley and Elizabeth Davis. Local Police Departments, 2016: Personnel. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2019). <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd16p.pdf>

25. Federal Bureau of Investigation. "2019 Crime in the United States." Table 74: Full-time Law Enforcement Employees. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-74>

The working groups for this project included professional staff members who had achieved leadership positions in their agencies. They and other participants identified some of the unique challenges that professional staff members face.

Feeling like “second-class citizens.” When politicians, community leaders, and even some police executives speak about policing, they often focus exclusively on sworn personnel. Debates over how many sworn officers a jurisdiction needs are ubiquitous, but one almost never hears similar discussions about the need for crime scene technicians, data analysts, telecommunicators, and other positions predominantly held by professional staff members. These support personnel are often left out of news conferences or other communications about department achievements, and they may not be adequately included at agency award ceremonies or other events. This lack of recognition can leave professional staff employees feeling under-valued and not respected by their organization.

Lack of clear career paths. Compared with their sworn colleagues, professional staff members in many agencies lack obvious career paths or a clear process for advancing in their careers. And if

a professional staff member works in a small, highly specialized unit, the only chance to move up may be when a higher-ranking member of that team leaves. Police agencies traditionally have not focused attention on cross-training their professional staffs or helping them prepare for advancement. As a result, many talented people leave departments because that is the only way to advance their careers.

Professional staff executives face particular challenges. Women in sworn executive positions often emphasize the importance of role models and mentors in their career development. For women executives who are professional staff, finding role models and mentors can be extremely difficult. There simply are not a lot of women who fit that profile in many police agencies, and there is not a tradition of mentorship for these employees. Another challenge can occur when professional staff executives supervise sworn personnel in their units. Because the police culture has traditionally viewed sworn personnel as “higher” or more important than professional staff, it can be difficult for professional staff leaders to get the buy-in and respect from their sworn employees. This challenge can be exacerbated when the professional staff executive is a woman.

Our civilians don't see a career path here. They don't see a space to advance. We just did a civilianization and staffing optimization study. Our civilians said, "We don't have the same ranks," or "Our civilian ranks don't match our sworn ranks." There is not a lot of parity either. So, I think what happens is that civilians have to fight really hard not to be seen as a second-class citizen without a gun and a badge.

**Blake Norton, Chief Strategy Officer
Philadelphia Police Department**

If Nursing Can Do It, Why Not Policing?

Policing is often compared to nursing. Both professions work around the clock. They regularly deal with emergencies that produce unpredictable schedules and the need for overtime. Both involve high-stress, often life-or-death situations.

In terms of the gender makeup of their workforces, however, the two professions are polar opposites. Women constitute just 12% of all police officers in the United States, but they account for more than 85% of nurses.²⁶

Recognizing that nursing is an occupation that historically has been dominated by women,

some of the working group participants wondered how the nursing profession can continue to attract and retain so many women, many of whom are working mothers. One of the biggest factors seems to be more flexible scheduling that many nurses enjoy, including shift selection, weekend alternative schedules, and part-time or job-sharing opportunities. Other approaches include on-site childcare, accommodations for nursing mothers and employee wellness resources, such as stress management, financial wellness, and support groups.

Women make up 90% of nurses. Those women are mothers, they take leadership roles, they work swing shifts, they work 12 hours as the norm – and they're able to do it. So, the same way that the nursing profession can manage family and childcare, policing should be selling it that way too. Or at least not automatically setting it up as a barrier because, obviously, it's not a barrier in nursing."

**Ivonne Roman, Chief (ret.)
Newark (NJ) Police Department**

26. Day, Jennifer Cheeseman, and Cheridan Christnacht. "Women Hold 76% of All Health Care Jobs, Gaining in Higher-Paying Occupations." United States Census Bureau. Aug. 14, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/08/your-health-care-in-womens-hands.html>

Perspectives from Other Police Leaders

AT PERF'S 2022 ANNUAL MEETING IN SAN FRANCISCO, staff presented the preliminary findings from the Women in Policing Leadership survey. PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler then asked several women police chiefs and other leaders in the audience to offer their reactions to the study and their general observations on the state of women in police

leadership. The ensuing discussion provided a candid and informative assessment of the challenges women police executives face and how the women and their agencies can overcome those challenges.

The comments below are excerpted and edited for clarity and brevity.

Participants in PERF Annual Meeting Discussion on Women in Police Leadership

- Sheree Briscoe, Deputy Commissioner, Baltimore Police Department
- C.J. Davis, Chief, Memphis Police Department
- Melissa Hyatt, Chief, Baltimore County Police Department
- Betty Kelepecz, Chief (ret.), San Diego Harbor Police Department
- Charlotte Lansinger, PERF Executive Search Expert
- Barbara Lark, First Deputy Commissioner, Buffalo (NY) Police Department
- Kathy Lester, Chief, Sacramento Police Department
- Sylvia Moir, Chief (ret.), Tempe (AZ) Police Department
- Danielle Outlaw, Commissioner, Philadelphia Police Department
- Kathleen O'Toole, Chief (ret.), Seattle Police Department;
- Commissioner (ret.), Boston Police Department
- Sonia Quinones, Chief (ret.), Hallandale Beach (FL) Police Department
- President, National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives
- Mirtha Ramos, Chief, DeKalb County (GA) Police Department
- Erika Shields, Chief, Louisville Metro Police Department
- Julie Swearingin, Assistant Chief, Fort Worth Police Department
- Teresa Theetge, Interim Chief, Cincinnati Police Department
- Jeri Williams, Chief (ret.), Phoenix Police Department

We have to make room for everyone at the table

*Sheree Briscoe, Deputy Commissioner
Baltimore Police Department*

You hear these slogans and words like “diversity” and “inclusion.” But diversity means nothing if a person is not included. There has to be room made for everyone to be at the table. Agencies say that they want something different. But when you get something different, too often people want it to perform the way it always did.

If you really want change, new ideas and innovation, and you want to bring up the next generation of leaders, you have to make room for those leaders. And that doesn’t look the way it did 30 years ago. It can’t. The world is changing. So the way we do business has to change.

Save a seat for a sister

*Sylvia Moir, Chief (ret.)
Tempe (AZ) Police Department*

I was sitting at a table at a California Police Chiefs Association meeting and in comes Jeri Williams, a new chief to California. I had my bag on a seat next to me. I went up to her and said, “Jeri, I’m Sylvia Moir and I saved you a seat.” And she said, “Well, I don’t know you.” And I said, “You will. We’re in this thing together.”

That was to give Jeri Williams a seat that she deserved, that she had earned, because if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu. And Jeri needed to be at the table to influence the way we think, the way we engage, the way we perform in the strategy, culture, and climate of policing. That was a demonstration of inclusion – to be beside someone, to lift up their voice, to amplify them. And that has carried on.

Diversity builds strength

*Erika Shields, Chief
Louisville Metro Police Department*

Having opportunities is huge, and many of those opportunities were afforded to me by men. To the men in the audience I say, “You are relevant to this conversation.” Don’t tune this out. Don’t check out

because this is a “woman’s issue.” You’re so important to where this goes.

We’re stronger when we’re listening to people who don’t look like us. Diversity builds strength.

I was fortunate. I had male mentors and female mentors

*Jeri Williams, Chief (ret.)
Phoenix Police Department*

I was fortunate. I had male mentors. I had female mentors. I had people who would tap me on the shoulder to offer assignments to me because they saw leadership potential in me. Creating opportunities where I didn’t think that opportunity was going to be available was critical.

Mentorship is also critical. And it doesn’t necessarily have to be women to women. It can be people to people.

Reach back and bring someone else along

*Barbara Lark, First Deputy Commissioner
Buffalo (NY) Police Department*

My very first Major Cities Chiefs conference was in Chicago, and I had the pleasure of having lunch with some phenomenal women – Jeri Williams, Erika Shields, Carmen Best. I was a district chief at the time, and they reached out to me and other women who were aspiring to be a chief. It was very powerful. And the message was to reach back and bring someone else along.

I’ve tried to do that in my department. We’ve started a mentoring program for all new recruits so that they have someone to look up to who can lead and direct them. I’m going to go back and start a mentoring program specifically for women.

Learning about the business of policing

*Kathleen O’Toole
Chief (ret.), Seattle Police Department
Commissioner (ret.), Boston Police Department*

But for the wonderful men in my career, I wouldn’t be where I am today. I was only 32 years old when [Boston Police Commissioner] Bill Bratton tapped me on the shoulder and said, “You know, I think you

have potential. I'd like you to be a part of my team. I'd like to make you the chief of administration." I looked at him and I said, "Really? Is that the 'girl's job?'" I said that I like being a cop, I like operations, I want to be out there on the front lines.

He said, "I'll tell you what. I'm going to do you a favor because you are going to learn a lot about managing and leading. You're going to learn about business, about HR and IT and budgets." And he pointed out that a lot of police chiefs don't know that stuff, and it's baptism by fire for them. "So, you do that job and do it well for a year-and-a-half, and when the chief of patrol retires, I'll make you chief of patrol." And he lived up to that promise, and every day since it's been an incredible adventure.

Being in non-traditional roles impacts those who follow

*Melissa Hyatt, Chief
Baltimore County Police Department*

When I reflect back on my career in the Baltimore City PD, I had a non-traditional career path. I spent the majority of my time in tactical assignments, and much of the time I was a first – the first female supervisor and team leader. It never really struck me at the time that when we're in these non-traditional roles for women, but it has an impact on the ones who follow us. A few years ago, a woman who was trying out for the SWAT team in the Baltimore City Police Department reached out and told me she remembered being a brand-new officer and seeing me.

It's really a lesson that we're providing opportunities, providing mentoring, giving people across the board the skills they need to be successful and doing that for everyone. It's less about how many of this category and how many of that. It's the diversity of people, the diversity of thought that we're bringing in, that is going to make us stronger as a profession.

You have the ability to change culture

*Danielle Outlaw, Commissioner
Philadelphia Police Department*

For those in positions of leadership, you have the ability to change culture. And not just say, "I'm putting you at the table." But, "I'm setting you up to

thrive." It's not a plug-and-play. Let people know that they are valued – not only that they have a seat at the table but that you're setting them up to succeed and that you value their input and their contributions.

I just hired a diversity, equity, and inclusion officer, and I'm finding that I have to spend more time explaining that she's *not* there to fire white males. All of this is to say, move with intention, give people an opportunity. I was given a lot of opportunities, but in all cases I was qualified – even overqualified. Give folks a chance.

Leveling the playing field with qualified women

*C.J. Davis, Chief
Memphis Police Department*

When I became chief in Durham, I quickly realized that few women had the same opportunities through the years as they did when I was in Atlanta. There were women at the lower ranks, but at that time, they weren't in the executive ranks. There had only been a limited number who served as field commanders out on patrol. I knew it was important for me as a woman to not just level the playing field but to do so in a way that identified *qualified* women – not just to ensure that they were there, but to ensure that they could also perform in executive roles.

Create opportunities, then encourage people to take them

*Kathy Lester, Chief
Sacramento Police Department*

I don't think it's always just a lack of opportunity, although I think we can always create more opportunities. What I'm finding is that women sometimes are really hesitant to take those opportunities. Some women just have a hard time believing in themselves. So, if I had an ask, it would be to make sure that you are encouraging people from all backgrounds to take opportunities that maybe they don't think they can necessarily do. I never would have even taken the sergeants test if it hadn't been for a captain who said, "Hey, you should really do this."

When we have the opportunities, we kind of just expect people to jump and take them, and we

don't really encourage people or tell them to be confident in themselves. Unfortunately, I see that more in women than I do in men. It's incumbent on all of us as leaders within our own organizations to create the opportunities, make sure you've got the right culture, and really encourage people and create those pathways to help them be successful.

Lifting up women in the department ... without alienating the men

*Teresa Theetge, Interim Chief
Cincinnati Police Department*

One of the things I'm trying to do as Interim Chief is to lift up other women in the department. Just last week we had our first Employees Resource Group for women in law enforcement. The Fire Department has had them for the last few years. We've started female marksmanship training at the target range, and female tactical training.

But I have to balance that with not alienating the men on the department. I'm hearing that the men are supportive of the women participating in these trainings and that the women are better officers because of the training. I still need to get the buy-in from even some of the women, that it's OK to be part of something female-specific, because they want to make sure their male counterparts are supporting them in these endeavors. So, at the Command staff meetings every Tuesday morning, that's the message I'm pushing down – to support these efforts because the department will be better for it in the end.

What people don't understand is that women need to over-compensate

*Mirtha Ramos, Chief
DeKalb County (GA) Police Department*

I am a first – the first woman ever to lead the DeKalb County Police Department. And with that comes a lot of expectations. And what people don't understand is the over-compensating that takes place. As a woman, you have to go in there and you have to prove that you got the job because you are smart enough, tough enough, and you can handle it. Not because you're a

woman, not because you're Black, not because your last name is Ramos. But because you were the best candidate out of the 104 who applied for the job.

Over-compensating is real, and it's a huge stress on those of us who have to do it. Because when you see a female get the job, some people don't automatically say, "She's the best." They say, "Hmm, I wonder if she got it because she's cute. I wonder if she got it because she's black or white." Why are you wondering? You weren't wondering when [my male predecessor] walked in the door. I want people to know that I got the job because I earned the job.

Women always have to prove ourselves

*Julie Swearingin, Assistant Chief
Fort Worth Police Department*

I am the first Latina in our department's history to achieve the rank past lieutenant. When someone questions my appointment or comments that I was promoted because I am Latina, my response is, "No, it is because I am a good cop, a strong leader, and being Latina is the bonus!" In this profession, women always have to work harder to prove ourselves. I can personally say, we do not let that get in the way, we take that challenge, and we will be successful.

Take advantage of resources like NAWLEE

*Betty Kelepecz, Chief (ret.)
San Diego Harbor Police Department*

There are organizations to help women become police executives. One of them is NAWLEE – the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives. I was its president in 1997. It is specifically designed to mentor women to become executives in law enforcement – both non-sworn professional staff and sworn. NAWLEE has a very robust mentorship program, with women in leadership positions mentoring other women who want to be in those positions. So, if you haven't taken advantage of NAWLEE, take the time to get to know them, to develop a relationship, and get your women mentored.

Why do I need a women-only organization?

*Sonia Quinones, Chief (ret.)
Hallandale Beach (FL) Police Department
President, National Association of Women
Law Enforcement Executives*

People ask, Why do I need a women-centered organization and conference? I can accomplish the same things men can. At NAWLEE, there is a different energy, passion, and excitement. You can be yourself and talk about challenges and opportunities. When I walked into a NAWLEE conference for the first time and saw many amazing women in leadership positions, I thought, Wow, I can do that. I can be in that seat. For the men attending the conference, they gain a greater insight on how to increase women in their organizations.

More women are going for chiefs' jobs, but it's often one-and-done

*Charlotte Lansinger
PERF Executive Search Expert*

The numbers of women who are expressing interest in becoming chiefs is much greater than it's ever been before. There's much more mentoring going on now, and I think that's having a really big impact on encouraging women to step up not only for chiefs' positions but just to promote within their organizations.

One of the things we have seen over time is that women take on a chief's position, and they want to do one and then they're done. Trying to pull them back into taking on another chief's position seems to be harder for some reason.

10 Action Items for Improving Leadership Opportunities for Women in Policing

THE RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN POLICING HIGHLIGHTS both the challenges that agencies face in trying to enhance gender diversity and the opportunities they have to bring about meaningful change.

PERF's survey pointed to several steps that agencies can take to improve female representation at all ranks, but especially in supervisory and leadership positions. Those ideas were expanded upon and amplified by the women police leaders who participated in our working group sessions and the discussion at PERF's Annual Meeting.

Following are 10 Action Items that agencies can undertake to improve gender diversity in their leadership ranks. As noted earlier, agencies could implement several of these steps right away, with few, if

any, additional resources required. Others may take more time and some resources. But on the whole, these Action Items should not be a heavy lift for most agencies.

While the 10 Action Items are not necessarily presented in order of importance, the first item – fostering an inclusive culture – is first for a reason. The message we heard from the hundreds of women who contributed to this project is that a supportive department culture is critical to increasing women in police leadership positions. Culture is the foundation about which all other reforms are built, and agencies need to get that one right if they are to be successful with the other Action Items.

As police executives we have to be intentional. One thing I made sure of was that we wanted to hire and promote women into our organization. Our police department had a less than stellar history when it came to women. They would test for promotion and score #1 or #2 to be lieutenants, captains, etc., and still have difficulty getting promoted. I looked at the top of the organizational chart when I was Interim Chief, and it was all white males and one white female except for me. It was disheartening because you are what you see, and you have to see diversity in an organization. We had no female lieutenants. Now we have 10 that I promoted within the last year. So, there are more women coming into the organization, more women excited to be in the policing profession, and more women excited to be going into leadership roles.

John Drake, Chief
Metropolitan Nashville Police Department

Action Item #1

Agencies should foster a culture in which all women feel included, valued, respected, and equal.

Many of the women PERF consulted for this project said that the “good ol’ boys” mentality still pervaded police agency culture. Leadership is dominated by men, and there is a perception – and often a reality – that men and women are treated differently. Men are given more opportunities, in assignments, training, and visibility. And women and men are treated differently when they make mistakes, according to many of the women we interviewed. Mistakes by men are frequently brushed off as “boys being boys,” while mistakes by women are frequently perceived as an example of their unfitness for the job.

One important way that agencies can foster an inclusive culture is by taking seriously complaints of discrimination and harassment and by investigating them thoroughly and objectively. For complaints of serious misconduct, some of the women we spoke with said the investigations should be moved outside the agency, to an independent party.

As Chief John Drake of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department said, police leaders need to be intentional – and honest – about assessing the state of the organizational culture, making improvements where they are needed, and then monitoring their agencies to ensure reforms are sticking.

Action Item #2:

Agencies should make it a priority to hire more women at the recruit level.

While this project focused on women in police leadership positions, there is a basic mathematical reality at work: to promote more women into leadership positions, agencies need to recruit and hire more women on the front end. That the percentage of women in policing has barely budged over the past decade creates both immediate issues for agencies looking to diversify their ranks and longer-term challenges as they look to promote more women into leadership positions. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for agencies to promote more women into supervisory and leadership positions if they do not

manage to increase the number of women coming in at the recruit level.

There are a number of specific steps that agencies can take to increase the number of women recruits. These include dedicated recruitment campaigns targeting women and efforts to reach some non-traditional female candidates (such as members of women’s sports teams or those in female-dominated professions such as teaching who may be looking for a career change). The Fort Worth Police Department is doing personal outreach to women who express interest in the profession and following up with information and assistance. Importantly, women need to see themselves in police recruiting materials, in a realistic and authentic manner. To achieve that, agencies should ensure that current women members are included on the teams that develop recruiting materials and recruit candidates.

One other step that agencies can take is to sign the 30x30 Pledge, in which they commit to take steps to increase the representation of women in all ranks. The goal of this nationwide initiative to increase the representation of women in police recruit classes to 30% by 2030. The initiative’s website has a number of low- and no-cost resources that can help agencies get started.

Action Item #3

Agencies should ensure that women are not being unfairly excluded from the hiring and training process, especially with respect to physical fitness standards.

Even after years of debate and litigation, it appears that women continue to be excluded from careers in policing in higher numbers than men because of failing to meet the physical fitness standards established for recruits.

Police agencies and academies, and the organizations that oversee them, should independently assess their physical fitness requirements. These assessments should focus on ensuring that physical fitness requirements are both job-related and reflect the activities that police officers typically engage in. In addition, academies should adopt policies that do not immediately disqualify recruits who fail to meet certain physical fitness standards. Rather, academies

should develop individualized fitness plans and work with recruits – both women and men – to help them meet the standards.

Agencies should also review their psychological screening tools to ensure they do not have a disparate impact on excluding women candidates.

Action Item #4:

Agencies should create or expand family-friendly policies and resources that support women (and men) in balancing the demands of the job and the needs of their families.

The demands that policing places on officers are enormous – round-the-clock shifts, unexpected events, mandatory overtime, and the like. The unpredictability of the profession can make it less attractive to many candidates, especially women who either have children or are planning to start a family.

To address these concerns, agencies should investigate and implement policies and programs that help both women and men achieve greater harmony between their work and family lives. For many new mothers, having accessible and private locations for pumping breast milk is essential. Childcare is a major concern of most working parents of young children, both women and men. Like the San Diego Police Department did (see page 40), agencies should look to offer affordable and accessible childcare to their employees through creative partnerships and funding arrangements.

In addition, agencies should explore alternative scheduling, part-time assignments, and job-sharing arrangements for employees who could benefit from them. While job sharing in policing appears to be more common in the United Kingdom and other non-U.S. countries, at least two U.S. agencies – the Huntington Beach (CA) Police Department and the Orange County (CA) Sheriff's Department – have experimented with job-sharing arrangements for both sworn and professional staff members.²⁷ Agencies should look at the experiences of agencies that have implemented job-sharing programs to learn about the potential and drawbacks.

Similarly, agencies should look at the experiences of departments that have offered part-time options. They should pay special attention to how part-time arrangements may impact the retirement system and, if required, make the required adjustments. And, of course, in many agencies, alternative arrangements would need to be negotiated with labor unions.

Nevertheless, if agencies are committed to attracting, retaining, and promoting more women, they need to seriously consider, implement, and evaluate a range of policy and programmatic options.

Action Item #5:

Agencies should provide women members with equal opportunities to the full range of assignments, including in specialized units.

Respondents to PERF's survey identified the opportunity to hold a variety of assignments as the most important factor in their career development. And several of the police leaders we heard from said the opportunity to work in specialized, tactical units was a critical element of their career development. Yet, there is still the perception – and, in some cases, the reality – that women are not given equal opportunity for assignments on SWAT teams, undercover units, motorcycles, or other specialized units.

Not having experience in these units at the operational level can preclude women from advancing to supervisory or leadership positions in these units, thus narrowing women's promotional opportunities overall. Several of the women we consulted for this project said women can get pigeon-holed into supervisory and leadership tracts that focus on areas such as juvenile and family crime, community policing, and administration.

Agencies should ensure that women have equal opportunities to all assignments, including those in specialized units that have traditionally been held by men. In addition to diversifying these units, this will open up a broader range of promotional and leadership opportunities for women because they will have a broader foundation of knowledge and experience.

27. Perrine, Lisa. "Job Sharing: A Viable Option for Law Enforcement?" FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. March, 2009 <https://leb.fbi.gov/file-repository/archives/march09leb.pdf/view>

And to help ensure a regular supply of women applicants for these specialized positions, agencies should showcase women already in these assignments and have them encourage other women to consider applying for them.

Action Item #6:

Agencies should ensure their promotional processes are transparent, equitable, and free of any biases that may have an adverse impact on women.

Many of the women PERF consulted for this project said that police promotional processes often lack transparency and equity, and some processes have not been substantially updated for years. They said testing processes are frequently developed, reviewed, administered, and normed by groups that are predominantly men. As such, the tests may have biases that have an adverse impact on women – for example, by focusing on areas of police operations that have traditionally been dominated by men.

Agencies should ensure that women are strongly represented on the internal teams that create and administer promotional tests. The promotional process should be clear and transparent to every member of the organization. Agencies should encourage and support promotional study groups specifically for women.

Also, as rank increases, promotional processes should focus increasingly on leadership skills and potential, and not simply on operational knowledge and experience.

Action Item #7:

Agencies should provide women members with equal opportunities to attend training and other development activities throughout their careers.

In PERF's survey, respondents said that having access to specialized training opportunities was one of the key factors in their career advancement. The value of programs such as PERF's Senior Management Institute for Police (SMIP), the FBI National Academy, and the Police Executive Leadership Institute (PELI) is clear, especially for those seeking chiefs' positions.

Chiefs in most large and many medium-sized agencies completed one or more of these programs.

However, attending these leadership programs can be challenging for mothers (and fathers) who are single parents or have significant family responsibilities that can't be easily delegated while they are away at training. Agencies should look for a wide range of training opportunities, both in-person and virtual, and they need to ensure that women have equal opportunities to attend these trainings. Where possible, agencies should look to bring training to their departments or form regional compacts for bringing in specialized trainers, especially on management and leadership topics that are so crucial for advancement.

Action Item #8:

Agencies should create or expand mentoring and career development programs geared toward women.

Across the board, women who PERF consulted for this project said two things about mentoring programs: they are critically important to the development of women's careers, but they are not nearly as widespread or accessible as they need to be. We heard of several, mostly large agencies that have initiated mentoring programs geared specifically for women, but such programs are not present everywhere.

Agencies that don't have women-focused mentoring programs should establish them. Agencies that have programs should examine their efforts in terms of usage and effectiveness, and make appropriate adjustments. Agencies should consult with human resources and executive coaching experts to ensure their mentoring programs reflect industry standards and best practices.

Mentorship resources should be offered to women (and men) early on in their careers – ideally, at the time they enter the academy. In addition, agencies should make their members aware of outside mentoring resources that may be available to them. During our research, we learned that some women do not feel comfortable seeking mentoring and advice from members of their own agencies, out of concern that matters they discuss with their mentor could be revealed and undermine future

promotional opportunities. In these situations, the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives can assist with mentoring resources, as well as advice on how agencies can craft effective programs of their own.

Action Item #9:

Efforts to develop and promote women should not be restricted to the sworn ranks only. Agencies need to make a concerted effort to hire, promote, and provide opportunities to women members of their professional staffs.

While women are a distinct minority of sworn officers nationwide, in almost every agency women represent the majority of the non-sworn professional staff workforce. In these positions, women fill critical roles and provide tremendous value to their agencies.

However, the career paths and opportunities for growth and development for these women are often lacking or unclear. Unlike the rank structure among sworn employees, there is not always a clear promotional path for professional staff members. Furthermore, the opportunities for professional staff members to achieve executive command staff positions are often limited in many agencies. Even bureaus or divisions that have large numbers of professional staff employees are frequently headed by sworn executives, and some agencies appear reluctant to put professional staff executives in charge of sworn supervisors and employees.

Agencies should take a hard look at how their professional staff are treated. They should ensure that these employees have opportunities for promotion and advancement, which includes the chance to attend leadership training programs. (For example, PERF's SMIP program is not limited to sworn members; over the years, professional staff executives have attended and thrived at SMIP.) While professional staff members may have expertise in a particular area, they should be given the opportunity to develop their skills and transition to other areas where opportunities for advancement may be greater.

In addition, the contributions of professional staff members should be recognized during awards ceremonies, news conferences touting agencies successes, and other forms of recognition. Finally, agencies should ensure their sworn personnel are aware of the roles and contributions of professional staff members, as the NYPD is now doing with its recruit classes.²⁸

Action Item #10:

Agencies should collect and analyze data on women members in their department to identify possible disparities, obstacles to advancement, and strategies for improvement.

One theme we heard throughout this project is that agencies need to be "intentional" in their efforts to provide opportunities for advancement to women. But to be intentional, agencies need to have data on how they are currently performing, what obstacles exist for their women members, and what strategies may be effective in overcoming those obstacles.

Agencies need to do more than simply count how many women members they have joining and leaving their departments, being promoted, attending training, etc. They need to analyze the issues and trends behind those numbers. Why are women dropping out of the hiring and training process? How many are resigning after they've graduated the academy, and why? Why are they seeking, or not seeking, promotions? Are women promoting at the same rate as men, and if not, why? Do women aspire to the executive leadership ranks of their agencies, and are they getting the leadership training, skills, and experiences they need to succeed?

These are the types of questions agencies should be asking, and they need to be collecting the data to help them find answers. This may involve establishing metrics, fielding regular surveys of department members, conducting detailed exit interviews, performing data analysis, and sharing results with agency leaders and other decision-makers.

28. See <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6899455295584903168/>.

Conclusion:

The Time To Advance Women in Police Leadership Is Now

WHILE THE OVERALL NUMBER OF WOMEN IN policing – and in police leadership – remains stubbornly low in the United States, there is clearly a movement for change afoot. There are new national and local initiatives to boost the number of women entering the policing profession. And hardly a week goes by that there aren't news stories about an agency naming a female police chief, often the first woman to lead the agency. Women are being appointed to high-profile positions, including Commissioner of the NYPD, the nation's largest local law enforcement agency.

These initiatives and appointments provide a unique opportunity to jump-start the national conversation – and a national reckoning – about women in policing and women in police leadership. The time to act is now.

Efforts to advance women in police leadership need to be intentional and focused, and they need to be continuous and sustainable. As Nicola Smith-Kea said in one of the working group sessions, this can't be “just checking a box to say, ‘Yes, we dealt with this in 2021 and 2022 because we had all of this going

on in policing.’ What is the sustainability of all these efforts? How to make them sustainable and long-term is going to be really important, or we're going to have this same conversation 10 years from now, just like we had it 10 years ago.”

The 10 Action Items presented in this report offer a blueprint for agencies to follow as they seek to increase opportunities and pave the way for more women to advance to the highest levels of policing. Our survey revealed that once women get into the profession, their desire to move up and assume leadership positions increases. But our research found there are still barriers and obstacles that women face. Some of these are structural deficiencies that agencies can address through policies and programs. Others are cultural issues that will demand continuous attention and focus.

There is one critically important point raised by the women police leaders we consulted for this project: advancing women in policing cannot be just a “woman's issue.” These efforts must have the attention and support of men, or they will fail. Many women police leaders talk about the male mentors

This is not just a female issue. This is a law enforcement issue. This is an officer issue. It's not just affecting our women, but it will help grow our female members and our profession if we can address these issues across the board.

Maggie DeBoard, Chief
Herndon (VA) Police Department

who showed them opportunities and helped them along the way. For many of them, there were few, if any, female role models or mentors, so they had to rely on the men.

Today, fortunately, there are more women in leadership positions who can serve as role models and mentors, and these women are generally committed to step up and fill those roles. Even so, policing today remains a male-dominated profession. For

the recommendations presented in this report to take hold for the long term, both men and women – at all ranks, both sworn and professional staff – need to embrace this blueprint and work intentionally and courageously to implement it.

As several people emphasized during this project, diversity brings strength. Today, the policing profession could sorely benefit from the strength that comes through diversifying its leadership.

About the Police Executive Research Forum

THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM (PERF) is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force; developing community policing and problem-oriented policing; using technologies to deliver police services to the community; and developing and assessing crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development.

The nature of PERF's work can be seen in the reports PERF has published over the years. Most of these reports are available without charge online at <http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents>. All of the titles in the *Critical Issues in Policing* series can be found on the back cover of this report and on the PERF website at <https://www.policeforum.org/critical-issues-series>.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts

management studies of individual law enforcement agencies; educates hundreds of police officials each year in the Senior Management Institute for Police, a three-week executive development program; and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, who share information and open their agencies to research and study. PERF members also include academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected President and Board of Directors and a Board-appointed Executive Director.

To learn more about PERF, visit www.policeforum.org.



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AS THE CHARITABLE AND PHILANTHROPIC ARM of Motorola Solutions, the Motorola Solutions Foundation partners with organizations around the globe to create safer cities and equitable, thriving communities. We focus on giving back through strategic grants, employee volunteerism and other community investment initiatives. Our strategic grants program

supports organizations that offer first responder programming and technology and engineering education, and align to our values of accountability, innovation, impact, diversity and inclusion. The Foundation is one of the many ways in which the company lives out its purpose of helping people be their best in the moments that matter.

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**POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM**

Police Executive Research Forum
1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 930
Washington, DC 20036
202-466-7820
www.PoliceForum.org

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