



**Review of the Prince William County, VA
Police Department's
Recruitment and Hiring Practices**

Final Report

May 2021



Executive Summary

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In January 2020, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) was commissioned by the Prince William County Police Department (PWCPD) to conduct a review of the agency's recruitment and hiring practices. PERF's review included an examination of the department's policies, protocols, and data related to hiring and recruitment. The purpose of this study was to identify areas where PWCPD can improve its hiring practices, particularly with regard to improving diversity within the department.

This report presents PERF's findings and recommendations regarding PWCPD's hiring and recruitment processes, as well as data collection related to hiring.

National Perspective

Prince William County is not the only jurisdiction in the United States reviewing its recruiting and hiring practices. In 2019 PERF conducted a national project in which law enforcement executives discussed the major challenges they are facing in recruiting and hiring. These issues are detailed in PERF's report¹, which begins with the following summary:

The policing profession is facing a workforce crisis. Fewer people are applying to become police officers, and more people are leaving the profession, often after only a few years on the job. Traditional sources of job applicants—the military and family members of current officers—are diminishing. And the often-rigid, quasi-military organizational structure of most police agencies does not align with the preferences of many of today's job applicants.

The work of policing itself is changing. Criminal offenders are committing new types of cyber-crime, and are using computers to commit old types of crime in new ways, so officers must understand and be comfortable with new technologies.

Furthermore, today's police officers increasingly are being asked to deal with social problems, such as untreated mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. As a result, the skills, temperament, and life experiences needed to succeed as an officer are becoming more complex.

So even as police departments are struggling to get enough applicants in the door, they need to be raising the bar and looking for applicants with a wider array of talents and skills.

The Prince William County Police Department asked PERF to study its recruiting and hiring practices and to provide specific recommendations that will help the department to hire officers with the skills, attributes, and diversity needed to be effective in a 21st century policing department.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are based on findings from PERF's review, which included a review of PWCPD's protocols and processes related to hiring and recruitment, an analysis of the department's

¹ *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It.* PERF, 2019.
<https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>

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data on job applications received from potential candidates, as well as interviews with PWCPD personnel and observations made during PERF's site visits. The review and resulting recommendations were completed in December 2020.

Throughout the course of this review, PERF's project team regularly discussed its ongoing findings and recommendations with PWCPD leaders. PWCPD began making changes to its practices based on these discussions, so at the time of this report, the department has already implemented some of PERF's recommendations. In February of 2021, Peter Newsham, former Chief of the Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department, was appointed as the new chief of PWCPD. Chief Newsham promptly made a number of changes to PWCPD's hiring processes in line with PERF's recommendations, and as of the time of this report, PERF is aware that some of the changes are still in progress. These changes are noted throughout the report.

This executive summary presents an overview of key findings and recommendations included in the report.

PERF's Review of Personnel Bureau Documents

Eligibility Criteria Guidelines

PWCPD's Eligibility Criteria Guidelines document lists criteria for the selection of police department job applicants. This internal document outlines criteria that can disqualify a candidate from the hiring process, including criminal activity, drug use, traffic offenses, excessive alcohol usage, prejudice, a problematic financial history, issues of character, litigation involving the candidate, and body art. The document also outlines federal, state, and county requirements, including age, education, and citizenship requirements.

Finding: Eligibility criteria need updating and improvement in several areas. PERF found that some of the criteria were vaguely worded and could use clarification. Eligibility criteria should be as objective as possible in order to reduce the possibility of bias in the hiring process.

PWCPD's focus on applicants' recent drug use, as opposed to lifetime use, is a good practice and ensures that applicants are not penalized for past behavior that may no longer be a reflection of their character. However, PWCPD should reconsider some of its drug-related requirements, especially pertaining to marijuana use.

The eligibility requirements state that applicants must not harbor prejudices toward any class or group. PWCPD should ensure it has a reasonable method for identifying these types of prejudices. In addition, the document contains criteria on applicants' financial history that should be reviewed for clarity and suitability for inclusion. PWCPD should also clarify some of the character traits outlined in the eligibility criteria, and ensure they are objective and clearly defined.

PWCPD currently only hires applicants who are U.S. citizens. To attract more applicants from diverse backgrounds, PWCPD may want to reconsider this requirement. Finally, the PWCPD Personnel Bureau should review and revise all eligibility requirements as a group, to ensure they are as clear and objective as possible. These criteria should be reviewed and discussed annually with the chief of police.

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Recommendation: Define eligibility requirements more clearly. *PWCPD should ensure that eligibility requirements are clearly defined and do not allow for a wide range of interpretations on the part of PWCPD hiring personnel. It is important that eligibility criteria be objective and applied consistently to reduce opportunities for potential bias.*

Recommendation: Examine criteria on “concealing or omitting information”. *PWCPD should examine the types of reasons that applicants are disqualified for “concealing or omitting information” during the application process. In general, if the omitted information does not in itself violate one of the eligibility requirements, PWCPD should not disqualify an applicant on that basis alone.*

Recommendation: Avoid disqualifications of applicants for financial difficulties. *When considering applicants’ financial history, PWCPD should consider the reasons and implications of any unsatisfied debt before deciding to disqualify a candidate. In today’s economy, it is common for young people to have credit card debt, student loan debt, or any number of financial issues. However, this may not necessarily impact an applicant’s ability to be an effective police officer. In addition, because research has shown that there are racial/ethnic and gender disparities in income, wealth, and financial challenges,^{2,3} focusing heavily on financial history may disadvantage these groups in the hiring process.*

Recommendation: Do not automatically disqualify applicants who lack U.S. citizenship. *A lack of U.S. citizenship should not be an automatic disqualifier for applicants. PWCPD should allow applicants who can legally work in the U.S. and are otherwise qualified to progress through the hiring process, regardless of U.S. citizenship. When candidates successfully complete the hiring process, PWCPD can then seek the exception from the state to waive the citizenship requirement. After these individuals are hired, they can then work toward obtaining citizenship. This may encourage more diverse candidates to apply who would otherwise be disqualified. As most agencies do require U.S. citizenship, this would be a progressive policy change by PWCPD to demonstrate its commitment to diversity.*

Recommendation: Post eligibility requirements online. *PWCPD should make its eligibility requirements, especially those that are objective and will result in automatic disqualification (e.g., drug use requirements), publicly available by posting them on the agency’s website or including them in the job description for police officers. This will promote transparency and ensure that potential applicants are able to see whether they meet the eligibility requirements prior to submitting an application. This will also save time for PWCPD in reviewing applications that will ultimately be rejected.*

PWCPD Action Taken: *Discussions with PWCPD staff indicate that they have already initiated changes to the eligibility criteria based on PERF’s recommendations.*

² Addo, Houle, and Simon (2016). *Young, Black, and (Still) in the Red: Parental Wealth, Race, and Student Loan Debt.* <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12552-016-9162-0>

³ Elmelech and Lu (2004). *Race, ethnicity, and the gender poverty gap* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0049089X03000449>

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Personnel Bureau Manual

PWCPD's Personnel Bureau Manual outlines personnel bureau staff positions and responsibilities, and appears to adequately describe current hiring protocols. After recommended changes to hiring and recruiting protocols are implemented, PWCPD should update the personnel bureau manual to reflect all changes.

Recommendation: Expand language about how personnel should reflect the agency's values. *In the "purpose" section of the manual, PWCPD should expand upon the agency's mission and organizational values by describing the goal of the personnel bureau to hire qualified candidates who are reflective of the community it serves.*

PERF's Review of the Hiring Process

Finding: Early in the process, personnel bureau staff meet to discuss application decisions jointly, which is a good practice. PWCPD's hiring process includes many steps, including the following:

- An initial application,
- A Personal History Statement (PHS),
- A physical fitness test,
- A polygraph exam,
- A background investigation, and
- A psychological evaluation.

PWCPD holds monthly "BQ" (Better Qualified) Reviews, in which Personnel Bureau staff meet as a group to review any candidates with issues that have emerged in the initial application screening or Personal History Statement that could potentially detract from the candidates' applications.

These meetings ensure that each member of the Personnel Bureau can weigh in to ensure the hiring guidelines are being applied consistently. **These reviews are a good practice to ensure that the diverse perspectives of the Personnel Bureau staff can be heard, and that a single person is not responsible for disqualifying an applicant based on criteria that may be open to interpretation.**

Recommendation: Expand discussion on application decision-making to later steps in the process. *After the polygraph and background investigation, multiple members of the personnel bureau should review any decisions to disqualify candidates, especially in cases where the reason is subjective. Applicants who are at risk of being disqualified after these phases could be part of the BQ Review process described above, in which all members of the personnel bureau weigh in to ensure consensus and reduce potential bias.*

Applicant Data

PERF reviewed each phase of PWCPD's hiring process to explore where applicants are most frequently disqualified, and to identify any potential barriers that may prevent PWCPD from hiring diverse applicants. PERF reviewed data from July 2018 through April 2020 on the number of applicants who

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were disqualified after each phase of the hiring process, including breakdowns by race and gender. Overall, 116 of the 3,970 total applicants (2.9%) who applied to PWCPD between July 2018 and April 2020 were ultimately hired.

The findings and recommendations in this section are based on PERF's observations and PWCPD's available data. In some areas of the hiring process, we observed discrepancies in the proportions of applicants disqualified by race/ethnicity and gender. This is an area of concern and merits continued examination and follow-up to identify any barriers that may adversely impact applicants.

Based on the information available, we reviewed each phase of the process to identify potential barriers to applicants, such as questions that may be perceived as intimidating, or standards that may be outdated.

Going forward, PWCPD should continue to collect data on the applicants disqualified at each phase of the process by race and gender, as well as the reasons for disqualification, to further explore potential barriers and identify areas for improvement.

Initial Applications Submitted

Findings: Disparities in disqualifications by race/ethnicity and gender were not seen in this first step.

Of the 3,970 applicants who submitted an initial application between July 2018 and April 2020, about 9% were disqualified. There did not appear to be any substantial differences in the percentage of applicants disqualified **at this initial phase** by race/ethnicity or gender.

Application Form

Finding: Some questions on the application form are not relevant to the decision-making process at this step. The online application asks a series of questions including whether the applicant is a citizen, whether they meet the minimum age requirements (21 at completion of the academy), and other background information.

The application also has a question about how the applicant learned about the job, so that PWCPD can measure the effectiveness of its various outreach efforts. **This is a valuable question, and PWCPD should routinely review the responses to this question to determine which of its outreach efforts are generating the most applicants.**

Some questions on the initial application did not appear to be consistent with the eligibility criteria. While the initial application form should screen out applicants who do not meet basic eligibility criteria, any questions that would not automatically result in the disqualification of an applicant or require further review should not be included on the initial application. The initial application screening should solely solicit information that can be used to immediately screen out applicants without additional follow-up, if applicable.

For example, the application asks whether an applicant has ever been terminated from a previous job. A previous termination should not be disqualifying without further information, because there are many reasons why a person may be terminated from employment through no fault of their own. This question on the application form may discourage qualified persons from filing an application.

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Questions such as this can be asked later in the process, when candidates are given an opportunity to explain the circumstances.

Recommendation: Issues that require explanation should be explored at a point in the process when applicants can provide the explanation. *Questions that require further detail and follow-up such as whether the applicant has been terminated from a previous job, should be included at a later stage of the process, such as when the applicant is asked to complete the Personal History Statement, not in the initial application. Applicants should be asked to fully explain the circumstances of the termination, and this information should be considered by Personnel Bureau staff during the “Better Qualified” review process.*

Recommendation: Move question about selling drugs to the Personal History Statement. *In accordance with the recommendation above, PWCPD should relocate the question “Have you ever sold, grown, manufactured or cultivated any illicit substances?” to the Personal History Statement, not the initial application. Further information about distribution or cultivation of illicit substances can be asked in later sections of the hiring process to further understand the context of these actions, and this information can be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.*

[Applicants Asked to Complete a Personal History Statement \(PHS\)](#)

Finding: Two-thirds of all applicants, and a larger proportion of Black applicants, did not return the Personal History Statement. This is an area of concern in the application process, and should be reviewed carefully to determine why many applicants are not returning the PHS.

A significant portion of applicants whose initial applications were accepted (about 64%) did not take the next step and return the Personal History Statement form. For both male and female applicants, a larger proportion of black applicants did not return the PHS compared with other racial/ethnic groups. Black females were even less likely than black males to return the PHS, with over 80% failing to return the form.

The available data do not explain *why* black applicants were less likely to submit the PHS form, but this suggests that the PHS is a barrier for black applicants more than for applicants in other racial/ethnic groups. On pages 43-46, we review the content of the PHS to identify potential questions that may be burdensome or intimidating to applicants. In addition, PERF surveyed applicants who did not return the PHS (see findings below). PWCPD should make a practice of conducting this type of research going forward.

PWCPD currently has a process in place to follow up via email or phone with applicants who did not return the PHS to answer any questions they may have about the paperwork and assist them with completing it. In addition, PWCPD is asking applicants about the reasons they did not return the PHS. Consistent documentation of this information is a good practice, as it may help to identify barriers to applicants in completing the PHS, especially black applicants. PWCPD should ensure it is tracking this information in its new software system going forward. This information can help to inform future hiring efforts and potential changes that may need to be made to the PHS form.

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PERF Survey of Applicants Who Did Not Return the Personal History Statement

In an effort to understand why applicants did not return the PHS, PERF created a brief online questionnaire for applicants who failed to submit the form. PWCPD's Administrative Specialist sent the survey via email to 819 applicants who applied to PWCPD between June 2019 and March 2020, but who did not return the PHS. Overall, 128 (16%) individuals completed the survey.

Finding: Applicants had many reasons for not completing the PHS. Some can be addressed.

- 27% of the respondents forgot to submit the form within the allotted timeframe.
- 19% of respondents indicated that the PHS was too long or burdensome.
- 13% of respondents reported that they did not think they would meet the hiring requirements. Some of the responses indicated a lack of understanding of PWCPD's eligibility criteria, and suggested that applicants may be deterred from proceeding with the hiring process based on factors that may not actually disqualify them (e.g., minor credit issues).
- 12% said they lacked the required documentation (e.g., birth certificate, Social Security card, school transcripts, etc.).
- 10% said they were no longer interested in a career at PWCPD.
- 9% were hired by another agency.
- 6% said they were no longer interested in a career in law enforcement.
- A few respondents reported that they did submit PHS form but that they did not receive acknowledgement of their submission.

Recommendation: Provide more time for filing a Personal History Statement. *More than one-fourth of PERF's survey respondents reported that they simply forgot to complete the PHS within the allotted timeframe. Currently, applicants have two weeks to complete the PHS form after they submit the initial application. PWCPD should consider increasing the timeline to a month, to encourage more applicants to submit the form.*

Recommendation: Use emails and/or phone calls to encourage applicants and show interest in them. *PWCPD should send reminder emails to applicants who have not yet submitted the PHS after two weeks to remind them to complete this phase of the process. In addition, PWCPD recruiters should telephone applicants who have not yet submitted the PHS to follow up with them and answer any questions they may have about the hiring process.*

This will ensure applicants have personal contact with recruiters, which sends an important signal that PWCPD is an open, welcoming organization. Importantly, PWCPD should continue to track data on the number of applicants who fail to submit the PHS, in order to determine whether these reminders have a positive impact.

Recommendation: Work to ensure that misperceptions about eligibility do not cause applicants to drop out. *A number of respondents indicated that they did not think they met the eligibility requirements, but some perceptions about the eligibility requirements appeared to be incorrect. As recommended above, PWCPD should post its eligibility criteria online to ensure transparency, and to ensure that applicants are not deterred from proceeding with the hiring process due to misperceptions about the requirements.*

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Applicants Who Returned the Personal History Statement

Findings: Among male applicants who returned the PHS (N =1,056), 36.4% of white males were disqualified after submitting the PHS, compared to 51.6% of black males, 46.6% of Hispanic males, 27.3% of Asian males, and 46.3% of males in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

Among female applicants (N = 231), 30.4% of white females were disqualified after submitting the PHS, compared to 40% of black females, 37.9% of Hispanic females, 23.1% of Asian females, and 50% of females in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

Black and Hispanic applicants were more likely to be disqualified at this phase than white applicants, and this was especially true of Black and Hispanic males. This suggests that the information requested on the PHS, or the way this information is interpreted in the hiring process, may have an adverse effect on Black and Hispanic applicants.

Recommendation: Review information requested in PHS for relevance. *PWCPD should review the information requested in the PHS to determine whether all of the information requested is relevant to an applicant's ability to become an effective police officer. Information solicited in the PHS should be objective and should not allow for a wide range of interpretations by hiring personnel in determining which applicants should be disqualified. **This is an important point in the application process that is resulting in a disproportionate number of applicants dropping out. Attention should focus on the reasons why this is occurring, and on problem-solving to increase the number of potential applicants to continue in the process.***

Recommendation: Applicants' personal information should be removed when reviewing Personal History Statements. *The individual responsible for reviewing the PHS forms should not be aware of an applicant's personal information, such as race or gender, when reviewing their PHS, to reduce the possibility of bias.*

Personal History Statement Content

PERF reviewed the contents of the PHS forms to compare them to PWCPD's eligibility requirements and identify potential barriers to applicants.

Finding: The application process appears old-fashioned. The form states that the completed Personal History Statement, along with the requested documents, should be mailed or hand-delivered to the Police Personnel Bureau. Requiring applicants to hand-deliver or mail the PHS may send the message that PWCPD is inefficient or behind the times, which may deter applicants in today's generation from wanting to proceed with the application process.

Recommendation: PWCPD should provide applicants with the option to submit the PHS online or via email. *Having to mail or deliver all of the required documentation to PWCPD may be challenging to some applicants and may deter them from wanting to proceed with the process. PWCPD should also consider allowing applicants to scan their documentation and send it via email to the Personnel Bureau. Further, adopting comprehensive applicant tracking software would allow for the PHS to be submitted online in a single system. This would make the process more efficient and encourage participation.*

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Finding: Many questions in the PHS seem irrelevant or burdensome. Financial information appears to be emphasized heavily in the PHS, appearing as one of the first sections in the form. Some of the questions in the PHS appear to be unreasonably burdensome, including asking applicants for an exhaustive accounting of their credit history and driving history. In addition, there were some questions on the PHS that were duplicative of information requested elsewhere in the hiring process. Finally, several questions appeared to ask for information that is not reflective of PWCPD's eligibility criteria (examples are discussed in recommendations below).

Recommendation: Remove questions on financial history. *Because most financial information will be available in an applicant's credit history, PWCPD should remove questions on financial history from the PHS and simply review this information during the background investigation. If any areas of concern emerge from an applicant's credit history, PWCPD can inquire about those issues during the background investigation.*

Recommendation: Remove the question about traffic violations. *PWCPD should remove the question about traffic violations and citations from the PHS. Information on driving violations or citations should be obtained during the background investigation.*

Recommendation: Revise the section about substance use history. *PWCPD should revise the illicit substance use section of the PHS to be consistent with eligibility requirements on drug use. Specifically, the PHS should only ask whether applicants have used various drugs within the established timeframes outlined in the eligibility criteria.*

PWCPD Action Taken: *PWCPD has initiated efforts to streamline and remove unnecessary questions from the PHS.*

[Applicants Assigned to the Physical Fitness Test \(PT\)](#)

Finding: PWCPD's physical fitness test appears to be resulting in female candidates being disqualified.

Overall, nearly double the proportion of female applicants (29.7%) were disqualified after being assigned to the PT as compared to male applicants (15.9%). Female applicants were also more likely to withdraw after being assigned to the PT than males (10.7% vs. 5.3%, respectively).

PWCPD's physical fitness requirements were developed based on criteria established by the Cooper Institute for Aerobic Research, and include a 1.5 mile run, bench press, push-ups, sit-ups, a 300 meter sprint, and a vertical jump. **When PERF observed one of PWCPD's PT tests, we noticed that several female candidates did not pass the test by a small margin, mainly because they did not pass tests that measure upper body strength.**

PWCPD's current PT test requirements are not reflective of the physical requirements listed in PWCPD's eligibility criteria for becoming an officer. Additionally, it appears that PWCPD's current PT test requirements are having an adverse effect on female applicants.

There are no national standards for physical tests in policing, but some police departments have taken approaches that are more closely linked to the work of policing. For example, the Virginia State Police uses a 150-yard obstacle course with 10 obstacles that must be completed within 1 minute and 36

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seconds.⁴ The Fairfax and Arlington County Police Departments have similar physical agility tests that require applicants to wear a weighted vest, similar to the ballistic vest and gun belt worn by officers, while completing several tasks. Applicants are given a suspect description at the beginning of the test. They then must complete tasks including a 75-yard run, jumping over a wall, clearing several curbs, and carrying or moving a weight or dummy, and they are then asked to repeat the suspect's description.⁵ These tests are designed to simulate real-world tasks and scenarios.

Recommendation: Revise the physical fitness test to reflect the real-world tasks in policing.

PWCPD should revise its physical fitness standards to ensure that they do not disproportionately disadvantage female applicants. This should include revising the department's physical requirements to make them more reflective of the duties that police officers perform on the job, specifically those listed in the eligibility criteria. This could include wearing a duty vest while completing an obstacle course, including running, walking, crawling, dragging, and climbing, among other tasks. After making this change, PWCPD should monitor data on the applicants who pass the fitness test to determine whether this format has a positive impact on female applicants' progress through the process.

Recommendation: Allow candidates to retake the physical fitness test. *PWCPD should allow applicants to retake the PT test as many times as they wish in order to pass the test. This will also encourage female applicants who may be intimidated by the test.*

Applicants Assigned to Polygraph Phase

Finding: Roughly half of candidates who make it to the polygraph phase are disqualified, and PERF observed some racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in disqualification rates.

Recommendation: The polygraph process should be subjected to an ongoing review, including a review of the questions being asked and the factors or decision points that result in applicants being rejected from the recruitment process. A decision to reject a candidate should not be made by a single person, but rather by a diverse panel of PWCPD Personnel Bureau leaders such as those currently involved in the BQ process.

Detailed recommendations are provided below.

Although polygraph results often are not admissible in court due to their unreliability in detecting lies, many police departments use the polygraph as part of their hiring process. PERF found that the majority of agencies in the Washington DC Metropolitan area use the polygraph as a tool to identify potential issues that may not be discovered during other phases of hiring process.

In PWCPD's hiring process, this phase includes a pre-test interview, the polygraph test, and can potentially involve follow-up interviews if any issues are identified that need further clarification. **Applicants cannot be disqualified solely for failing the polygraph test. Rather, information that applicants provide during the polygraph phase (including during the pre-test interview) can result in**

⁴ <https://policeacademyhub.com/virginia-police-academy-requirements/>

⁵ For an example of the Arlington Police Department's Physical Abilities Test, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDsiUsv1Q0>.

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applicants being disqualified, for example if they *reveal information during the process that is inconsistent with PWCPD's eligibility requirements*. PWCPD should ensure applicants are made aware of the reasons they are being asked to take a polygraph, so that the test does not intimidate or deter them from proceeding with the hiring process.

PERF's review found that among male applicants (N = 447), 48.6% of white males were disqualified after the polygraph phase, as compared to 55.6% of black males, 53.7% of Hispanic males, 55% of Asian males, and 54.2% of males in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups. Among female applicants (N = 78), 60.5% of white females were disqualified after the polygraph phase, as compared to 22.2% of black females, 58.3% of Hispanic females, 20% of Asian females, and 50% of females in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups. The number of females who made it to the polygraph phase of the hiring process is relatively low, so it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the proportion of females in various racial/ethnic groups who were disqualified at this phase.

Recommendation: Continually review data on the number of applicants who are disqualified during the polygraph phase, broken down by race/ethnicity and gender.⁶ *This data should be tracked over time to identify any potential trends in the proportions of various groups who are disqualified after this phase. In addition, PWCPD should collect data on the specific reasons that applicants are disqualified during the polygraph phase, and should examine this data to identify any potential barriers to applicants based on race/ethnicity and gender that may be occurring during this phase of the process.*

Recommendation: Review and consider polygraph pre-interview questions. *PWCPD should examine any specific questions in the polygraph pre-interview that may pose barriers to applicants, especially minority applicants, and should consider changes that may prevent possible bias in this process. Information asked in the polygraph pre-interview should be objective and consistent across applicants to limit any potential opportunities for bias on the part of the polygraph examiner. In general, if the information asked in the polygraph pre-interview does not directly correspond to PWCPD's stated eligibility criteria, then PWCPD should consider removing or revising these questions.*

Recommendation: Carefully consider disqualifications for "integrity" issues. *During interviews, PWCPD staff explained that applicants often are disqualified during the polygraph phase because they provide information during the pre-interview that is inconsistent with information previously provided, thus indicating an issue with "integrity"—such as disclosing substance use history that was not provided on the PHS. In reviewing the reasons applicants are disqualified during this phase of the process, PWCPD should pay close attention to these integrity-related issues to ensure they are objective and are not disproportionately affecting some applicants over others. In assessing these types of issues, PWCPD should consider whether these inconsistencies are severe enough to compromise an individual's ability to be an effective police officer, or if there may be a reasonable explanation for the inconsistent information provided.*

Polygraph Pre-test Interview Questions

⁶ Obtaining applicant tracking software, as discussed on page 15, will assist with this.

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- **Finding: Many pre-test interview questions do not appear relevant.** In reviewing the questions in the polygraph pre-test interview, it appeared that a number of the questions did not correspond to PWCPD's eligibility requirements. For example, the relevance of the following questions is unclear:
 - *Have you ever traveled abroad?*
 - *Are you currently having any problems with your spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend and/or closest friend?*
 - *Any previous marriages? Any child support issues?*
 - *Do you have a vehicle? Who makes the car payments?*

In addition, there were several questions soliciting information that is repetitive of information obtained in other parts of the process, including the background investigation. Overall, many of the questions in the pre-test interview should be subject to additional clarification and review by Personnel Bureau staff.

Recommendation: Ensure that pre-test interview questions are connected to eligibility requirements. *PWCPD should ensure that questions asked on the pre-test interview are consistent with established eligibility requirements. In addition, PWCPD should not include questions in the pre-interview that seem designed to intimidate applicants. PWCPD polygraphers should review each question in the polygraph pre-test interview to assess relevance and consistency with the eligibility criteria. Polygraphers should provide justification to personnel bureau leaders as to why certain questions are necessary and how they are relevant to established eligibility criteria. Any questions that are determined not to be relevant should be revised or removed.*

Recommendation: Remove redundant questions. *Information that will be obtained through driving record checks and credit checks can be removed from the polygraph pre-test interview. If any issues emerge in these areas, they can be followed up on during the background investigation.*

PWCPD Action Taken: *As of the time of this report, PWCPD has significantly streamlined the polygraph pre-interview questions to eliminate redundancy and collection of unnecessary information.*

[Applicants Who Completed the Background Investigation Phase](#)

Finding: About half of applicants that completed the background investigation phase were disqualified. Although the number of applicants who made it to the background phase was relatively low, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions, it appears that a higher proportion of nonwhite applicants than white applicants were disqualified at this phase.

Among male applicants, 43% of white males were disqualified after the background investigation, as compared to 53% of non-white males. Among female applicants, 33% of white females were disqualified after the background investigation, as compared to 48% of non-white females. Note that there were only 33 total females who completed the background process, so we may not be able to make generalizations about the proportions of females who were disqualified by race/ethnicity.

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Recommendation: Continue to monitor data on disqualifications in the background investigation phase. *PWCPD should continue to collect and analyze data on the specific reasons applicants are disqualified during the background phase to determine whether any part of the process has an adverse effect on particular racial/ethnic groups. If such areas are discovered, PWCPD should consider whether areas of the background investigation phase should be revised.*

Applicant Tracking and Data Challenges

Finding: PWCPD does not currently have a software system that allows for comprehensive collection and analysis of applicant data. PERF learned that PWCPD is currently tracking application data informally in a series of Excel spreadsheets. While these spreadsheets may be sufficient for PWCPD's internal tracking purposes, there are several limitations to this system. For example, based on the way the data is entered in the spreadsheets, it is difficult to tell at which point of the process candidates were disqualified. In addition, each application (as opposed to applicant) is entered as a new row of the spreadsheet. Since applicants can apply more than once, there is no mechanism to identify and distinguish individual applicants from one another. Finally, as the data is hand-entered into the spreadsheet, there are many opportunities for human error, and the spreadsheet is not updated in real time.

Recommendation: Adopt application tracking software. *PWCPD should adopt application tracking software that will allow for the review of applicants from the time they submit an initial application through each subsequent phase of the hiring process. This will allow PWCPD to accurately identify at which phases applicants are being disqualified, as well as any trends in race, ethnicity, gender, or other variables that may suggest opportunities for improvement. In addition, this software will allow for all applicant information, including the initial application and Personal History Statement, to be submitted via a single system. One example of such a software system, eSOPH⁷, is being used by departments such as the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, DC, where it has dramatically reduced the agencies' data processing time.*

PWCPD Action Taken: *As of the time of this report, PWCPD has contracted with eSOPH to adopt application tracking software, which will allow for comprehensive data collection and analysis on applicants going forward.*

Reasons Applicants Were Disqualified

PERF explored the specific reasons applicants were disqualified from the hiring process based on comments entered into PWCPD's Background Investigation Status spreadsheet. The spreadsheet includes the reasons applicants were disqualified at any phase of the process from the Personal History Statement through the background investigation phase.

⁷ <https://www.millermendel.com/esoph/>

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PERF classified these reasons for disqualifications into broad categories, using PWCPD's eligibility criteria as a guide. PERF also studied the distributions of these categories by race/ethnicity and gender to see whether certain groups were more likely than others to be disqualified for various types of reasons.

Providing false or misleading information: 31% of applications that were disqualified had at least one reason listed that fell into the category of lying, omitting, or providing false or misleading information. PERF found that Black applicants were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to have reasons in this category (42.5% of black applicants, compared to 31.8% of white applicants and 25.8% of Hispanic applicants).

Criminal behavior: 24% of applications had reasons listed that could be categorized as "criminal behavior." PERF did not observe major differences across race/ethnicity for this category. However, PERF noticed that some applicants appeared to have been disqualified solely for being a suspect in a crime, and some of the crimes listed as disqualifying factors appeared to be relatively minor.

Employment issues: 21.8% of applications had work or employment issues listed as reasons for disqualification. Black applicants were more likely to have a work/employment issue listed as a reason for disqualification than other racial/ethnic groups (27.4% of Black applicants, compared to 19.5% of white applicants and 20.3% of Hispanic applicants).

Voluntary withdrawals/No contact: Nearly 13% of applications withdrew voluntarily from the process, and about 11% were either listed as "no contact" or "no show." According to PWCPD's eligibility criteria, applicants can be disqualified for "failure to comply with departmental requests and appointments." However, in some cases it appeared applicants were disqualified in instances where there could have been more follow-up.

In addition, PERF observed that a higher proportion of female applicants than male applicants both withdrew (18% vs. 11.8%) and were disqualified due to no contact/no show (14.8% vs. 9.8%). A higher percentage of Hispanic applicants also appeared to withdraw as compared to other racial ethnic groups (16.4% of Hispanic applicants as compared to 12.9% of white applicants, 9.7% of Black applicants, and 11.6% of Asian applicants).

Financial reasons: Almost 10% of applicants had a financial reason listed for disqualification. PERF observed that a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic applicants had financial issues listed as reasons they were disqualified (15.9% of Black applicants and 11.7% of Hispanic applicants, as compared to 8% of white applicants).

Character: 7.1% of applications had reasons listed that could best be described as character judgments, including "maturity" or "lack of command presence." Because there was no further detail provided for these reasons, it was unclear what factors were considered to make these determinations.

Other issues: A number of applications had other reasons listed, including friends or family members engaging in drug use, or "exposure" to drug use. Other reasons for disqualification included "negative contact with law enforcement." However, there was rarely any further detail of what the negative contact consisted of. Finally, PERF observed some reasons that did not contain enough detailed information to be categorized. In addition, some reasons were listed that appeared to be questionable grounds for disqualification.

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Recommendation: Tighten rules and guidance for disqualifying candidates for omitting or providing misleading information. *PWCPD should consider the reasons candidates are disqualified for omitting or providing misleading information to determine whether these reasons are serious enough to warrant disqualification. In general, if the information omitted is not in itself a disqualifying factor, it should not be grounds for disqualification.*

Recommendation: Tighten rules and guidance for very minor criminal histories. *PWCPD should consider the severity of various crimes and how long ago the crime occurred in its decisions to disqualify a candidate. If an applicant's only criminal history is something minor such as "possession of a fake ID," for example, PWCPD should consider whether that is appropriate grounds for disqualification. PWCPD should ensure eligibility requirements for criminal activity are clearly defined, so that decisions are consistent and not subject to variation due to personal preferences of PWCPD hiring personnel.*

Recommendation: Establish objective criteria for disqualification related to work/employment issues. *Disqualifying criteria should not allow for a range of different interpretations on the part of hiring personnel. PWCPD should choose which types of issues it considers serious enough to disqualify a candidate from consideration as a police officer, and those that are not serious enough to support disqualification. For example, disqualification may be justified if a candidate was fired from a previous job for stealing valuable merchandise, but PWCPD should not require disqualification solely because a candidate left a previous job without giving two weeks' notice. Leaving a job without providing two weeks' notice should only be grounds for disqualification in combination with other factors.*

PWCPD also should review the specific reasons applicants are disqualified for employment-related issues across various racial/ethnic groups. If disparities are observed, this may be an indication of potential bias. Ensuring that disqualification criteria are objective and applied consistently across reviewers and applicants will help prevent bias.

Recommendation: Try to help applicants complete the process. *If applicants do not show up for the physical fitness test or other scheduled appointments, PWCPD should follow up with the applicant to determine what happened and attempt to reschedule the appointment. If multiple attempts are made to contact the applicant with no response, PWCPD will have no choice but to disqualify the applicant. But applicants should not be automatically disqualified after one missed appointment or contact.*

Recommendation: When applicants withdraw, try to find out why. *In order to better determine whether there is bias at any stage of the process, it is important to follow up with each candidate who withdraws, to determine whether there are patterns that could shine a light on changes that need to be made in process.*

When applicants withdraw from the hiring process, PWCPD should follow up with these individuals to identify the reasons why they are withdrawing. This will help to identify any potential barriers to applicants throughout the hiring process.

Recommendation: Reconsider disqualification for financial issues. *PWCPD should review and consider the types of financial issues that are serious enough to result in disqualification. Any*

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financial criteria should be objective and clearly defined. Going forward, financial issues should not be the sole reason for disqualifying an applicant, especially given that members of minority groups are more likely to be adversely affected by financial issues. It is noteworthy that the Philadelphia City Council recently made it unlawful for law enforcement agencies to use applicants' credit scores or other credit-related information in hiring decisions. There may be limited exceptions, such as candidates whose financial problems are a result of a history of gambling.⁸

Recommendation: Require discussion before disqualifying an applicant for subjective character traits. *Any concerns about an applicant's "maturity," "command presence," or other subjective character traits that are matters of interpretation should be discussed with the entire personnel bureau staff before the decision is made to disqualify an applicant.*

This could be done during the "Better Qualified Review" process described above. Further, PWCPD should provide clear documentation of the specific reasons and justification for disqualifying an applicant due to a lack of "maturity" or "command presence."

Recommendation: Do not disqualify candidates for actions of friends or family members or minor offenses. *Minor offenses such as marijuana use, friends and/or family members' behavior, and "exposure to" marijuana should not be grounds for disqualification of a candidate. Candidates may not be able to control their exposure to drug use, especially by friends and family, and this should therefore not reflect poorly on the applicant.*

Recommendation: Do not consider broad "law enforcement contact" in hiring decisions. *PWCPD should not consider any contact with law enforcement in hiring decisions other than being a suspect or person of interest in a crime. Any other contact with law enforcement is not relevant and should not be grounds for disqualification. In addition, any law enforcement contact that results in disqualification of an applicant should be clearly documented as PWCPD is collecting data on applicant reasons for disqualification.*

Recommendation: Clearly specify reasons for disqualifications. *PWCPD should make sure to clearly document reasons applicants are disqualified, as opposed to making notes such as "see file." This will allow for comprehensive data collection and analysis on reasons for disqualification. Adopting tracking software as recommended above will assist with improved documentation.*

Review of Recruitment Efforts

Findings: There are opportunities for improvement in use of social media, attracting female candidates, and providing incentives for lateral transfers. PWCPD employs a number of recruiting

⁸ <https://phila.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4638766&GUID=F05D6AD3-91FB-484E-AE44-86CFAFD950BB&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=200413>. See also "City councilwoman proposes legislation criminalizing racially motivated 911 calls." WHY? Sept. 11, 2020. <https://why.org/articles/city-councilwoman-proposes-legislation-criminalizing-racially-motivated-911-calls/>

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strategies, including sending recruiters to career fairs, military events, and local colleges and universities to provide information to prospective applicants. Based on conversations with a few PWCPD applicants, many reported that they learned about the opportunity through PWCPD's website. PWCPD has accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, which are maintained by the Social Media Liaison in the Public Information Office. These are the department's general social media accounts and are not specific to recruiting.

Currently PWCPD has approximately 14% female officers in its workforce. In addition to striving to improve racial and ethnic diversity within the department, PWCPD should also work to attract more female applicants.

According to interviews with personnel, PWCPD does not provide many incentives for attracting candidates from other law enforcement agencies. Certified law enforcement officers can receive up to 50% credit for years of service as a certified officer. However, according to interviews with PWCPD personnel, lateral applicants still have to go through the traditional academy before being hired.

Recommendation: Review data about how applicants learned about the job opportunity, to inform future recruiting efforts. *As discussed above, PWCPD asks a question on the initial application form about how applicants learned about the job opportunity. This information is valuable and should be reviewed periodically to inform future recruiting efforts. Going forward, this information could be collected in application tracking software, which would allow for easier collection and analysis of this data.*

Recommendation: Create social media accounts specifically for recruiting. *PWCPD should create social media accounts specifically for recruiting, distinct from the agency's main social media accounts. Doing so will help the department focus its messaging and engage with its target audience for recruiting, as opposed to the general public. For example, the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department maintains specific social media platforms⁹ for the recruiting and application process, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube accounts. These platforms are separate from the agency's traditional social media sites.*

Recommendation: Consider targeted ads on social media. *Given that a large proportion of PWCPD's target recruiting audience (i.e., 18-29 year-olds) use Instagram¹⁰, PWCPD should consider using targeted ads on Instagram in its recruiting efforts. Many businesses and employers around the country use targeted ads to attract applicants. Targeted ads appear on the social media feeds of users who meet certain criteria selected by the advertiser. The criteria vary by platform, but can include age, geography, gender, job title, education, and interests. Ads and costs are fluid and customizable. PWCPD's Personnel Bureau should work with the Public Information Office to explore this possibility.*

Recommendation: Consider working with a marketing firm or local business college. *PWCPD should identify local or regional marketing firms that can assist in the development of recruiting*

⁹ "MPD Invites You to Join our Virtual Hiring Process." <https://joinmpd.dc.gov/>

¹⁰ Whitney (2020). *The Complete Guide to Advertising on Instagram*.
<https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/11/20/instagram-advertising>

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campaigns.¹¹ Alternatively, PWCPD can seek out advice from organizations that have experience marketing to young adults. These include the military, local universities, and businesses. By creating an internship or student project with a local university, PWCPD can likely obtain marketing advice for little or no cost. For example, the Northern Virginia Community College Mathematics, Sciences, Technologies and Business Division¹², with campuses in Prince William County, has a program of study in marketing. The PWCPD could seek opportunities to partner with the college, seeking student and instructor input to continually improve the agency's promotion strategies.

Recommendation: Develop strategies for advancing women in policing. PWCPD should consider organizing a working group composed of former and current female law enforcement officers to help develop recruitment strategies targeted at women. For example, the National Institute for Women in Trades, Technology, and Science (IWITTS) has suggested efforts such as holding women-in-policing career fairs, and developing media platforms that promote and feature female officers. The Tucson, AZ and Albuquerque Police Departments have increased their number of female recruits using these strategies.¹³

Recommendation: Offer an incentive to officers for recruiting applicants. PWCPD should consider offering a cash incentive to officers who successfully recruit applicants. This strategy has been used successfully by other agencies, such as the Tucson, AZ Police Department.

Moving Forward

By commissioning this review and implementing the suggested reforms, PWCPD has signaled that it is committed to strengthening its hiring and recruitment practices with the goal of becoming more reflective of the community it serves.

First, it is important to understand that the policing profession nationwide is experiencing a workforce crisis. For several years or more, it has been clear that fewer people are applying to become officers, and more officers are leaving the profession. The major events of 2020 – demonstrations and protests about police actions, and the COVID-19 pandemic – exacerbated the problem. Furthermore, the work of policing is changing. Today's officers need greater skills in emerging areas such as cybercrime, and in handling social issues such as homelessness, drug abuse, and mental illness.

PWCPD's recruiting and hiring practices are mostly reasonable but can benefit from improvements in several areas:

- Eligibility criteria should be made more specific and clearly defined, to reduce the influence of unfettered discretion by personnel officials which may result in inconsistent decisions in hiring.

¹¹ Copple (2017). *Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century: Forum Proceedings*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0830-pub.pdf>

¹² <https://www.nvcc.edu/academics/divisions/mstb/index.html>

¹³ National Institute for Women in Trades, Technology, & Science (n.d.) *Recruiting Women Officers - Fact Sheet* <https://www.iwitts.org/recruiting-women-officers-fact-sheet>

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- Certain disqualifying factors, such as minor histories of drug use, financial problems, or previous employment problems, are out of date.
- PWCPD can be more transparent about its recruiting and practices, posting detailed information about the process online, which will prevent applicants from applying who do not meet the eligibility criteria.
- Racial, ethnic, and gender disparities can be detected through better data collection, which can be facilitated with dedicated job applicant tracking software. It is important to monitor why candidates are being disqualified or dropping out, and to follow up. PWCPD needs to make a concerted effort to identify any patterns that may be having an adverse impact on hiring.
- The application process can be modernized, starting with allowing candidates to apply online or by email.
- Female candidates can be encouraged with revised physical fitness tests that reflect the actual work of policing.
- The polygraph test can be a useful tool for identifying candidates who are ineligible for the job, but PWCPD should be more transparent about how and why it uses the polygraph, to prevent potential applicants from being intimidated or afraid of the process. Questions in the polygraph pre-test interview that are not connected to eligibility requirements should be deleted.
- Recruitment work can be improved with greater use of social media by PWCPD, use of social media advertising, and strategies for attracting female candidates and lateral transfers.

PERF's review found that PWCPD already has a number of good practices in place, and the recommendations provided in this report are intended to build upon this foundation and provide the agency with guidance that will improve diversity within the hiring and recruiting process. PERF identified specific areas in the hiring process that impacted minority candidates or women at higher rates. PWCPD should continually re-engineer any parts of the process that are found to have an unwarranted adverse impact.

Throughout the course of the review, PERF provided PWCPD with recommendations, many of which have already been implemented as of the time of this report. This demonstrates the agency's strong motivation to improve its hiring practices.

Introduction

In January 2020, the Prince William County, VA Police Department (PWCPD) commissioned the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) to conduct a review of the agency's recruitment and hiring practices, particularly with regard to improving diversity within the department. PERF's review covered a variety of aspects of the recruitment and hiring process for sworn officers.

PERF's review included a thorough analysis of PWCPD's hiring protocols and application materials to identify any potential barriers to applicants. In addition, PERF reviewed applicant data at each stage of the hiring process, with a focus on stages where applicants were disqualified and the reasons for disqualification, with further analysis by race/ethnicity and gender of the applicants. PERF also interviewed members of the Personnel Bureau as well as recent hires, and solicited input from PWCPD staff members and community members via email.

This report presents PERF's findings and recommendations regarding PWCPD's recruitment efforts, hiring processes, eligibility requirements, and Personnel Bureau staffing and budget.

About the Prince William County Police Department

The PWCPD is a full-service police department that serves Prince William County, Virginia. Prince William County is located in Northern Virginia and is part of the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The county has a population of approximately 470,000.¹⁴ As of 2021, the Prince William County Geospatial Technology Services reported that the population was 50% female, and the racial and ethnic composition of the county's residents was:¹⁵

- 42.9% White alone
- 23.5% Hispanic or Latino (of any race)¹⁶
- 20.3% Black or African American alone
- 8.3% Asian alone
- 4.3% Two or More Races.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: Prince William County, Virginia." Retrieved November 16, 2020 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/princewilliamcountyvirginia/PST045219>

¹⁵ Prince William County, VA. "Geospatial Technology Services: Fast Facts" Retrieved May 24, 2021 <https://www.pwcva.gov/department/gis/fast-facts>

¹⁶ Hispanics and Latinos include any race, whereas the other racial categories do not include Hispanics or Latinos

Introduction

At the time of PERF's review, PWCPD was comprised of 665 sworn officers. As of July 2019, 14.2% of the department's sworn officers were female, and the racial and ethnic composition of the department was:¹⁷

- 77.4% White
- 10.7% Hispanic or Latino
- 7.5% Black or African American
- 3.2% Asian
- 0.5% Native American
- 0.8% Other

The department is divided into four divisions: Financial & Technical Services; Support Services; Operations; and Criminal Investigations. The Personnel Bureau falls under the Support Services Division.

Project Scope and Methodology

PERF conducted a broad assessment of PWCPD's protocols and practices related to hiring and recruiting. Specifically, PERF's review consisted of the following:

- Review of relevant PWCPD policies and protocols, hiring standards, and testing procedures;
- Review of the hiring process to identify barriers that may adversely affect applicants based on race, ethnicity, or gender;
- Analysis of applicant data, including rates at which candidates drop out or are screened out of the hiring process by race/ethnicity, and gender;
- Review of PWCPD's recruitment and marketing efforts, including the agency website and social media presence;
- Review of the PWCPD's police officer workforce demographics, compared to PWC residents' demographics;
 - Since the demographic breakdown of the county population may not be reflective of the population that is eligible to become a police officer, PWCPD also asked PERF to estimate the percentage of the "eligible" police officer workforce in Prince William County (see Appendix B).
- Review of the Personnel Bureau staffing and budget.

PERF used the following methods to collect information regarding PWCPD's practices related to hiring and recruiting:

Process review: PERF reviewed a variety of PWCPD written documents and electronic materials, including:

- Personnel Bureau Manual
- Eligibility Criteria Guidelines for the Selection of Police Department Applicants

¹⁷ Data provided by PWCPD Personnel Bureau.

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- Personal history statement (PHS) parts 1 and 2
- Online application screening form
- Social media accounts
- Recruiting website
- Recruiting videos
- Polygraph pre-test interview questions
- Physical fitness test requirements
- Personnel Bureau Budget.

Interviews and on-site observations: In early and mid-2020, the PERF team conducted several in-person and virtual interviews with sworn and civilian PWCPD personnel, including:

- The Chief of Police
- Police Personnel Bureau Commanders and Supervisors
- Background investigators
- Human resources personnel
- Administrative specialists and support personnel
- Recruiters
- Polygraph examiners
- Recent hires
- Field training officers.

PERF also observed a physical fitness test and a “BQ Review” meeting (discussed in further detail on page 31)

Data collection and analysis: PERF collected and analyzed applicant data from PWCPD’s application software program, as well as from a series of Excel spreadsheets maintained by the Personnel Bureau. Specifically, the team analyzed data on the number of applicants disqualified at each phase of the hiring process, as well as the reasons that applicants were disqualified by race/ethnicity and gender. PERF also conducted a survey of applicants who submitted an initial application but did not ultimately submit a personal history statement (see page 39).

This report presents PERF’s findings and recommendations for how PWCPD can strengthen its hiring and recruitment practices, improve transparency, and promote diversity. After implementing these recommendations, PWCPD should ensure that updated protocols are documented in the Personnel Bureau Manual, and that Personnel Bureau staff members are trained on updated protocols discussed in this report.

Section I. Review of Personnel Bureau Documents

Personnel Bureau Manual

PERF reviewed PWCPD's Personnel Bureau Manual, which outlines personnel bureau staff positions and responsibilities, as well as a description of the selection process and salary determination requirements. This document appears to adequately describe current hiring protocols. When recommended changes to hiring and recruiting protocols are implemented, PWCPD should update the Personnel Bureau Manual accordingly to reflect the changes. In addition, the Eligibility Criteria Guidelines described below should be included as an attachment to the Personnel Bureau Manual.

Recommendation: Expand language about how personnel should reflect the agency's values.

In the "purpose" section of the manual, PWCPD should expand upon the agency's mission and organizational values by describing the goal of the personnel bureau to hire qualified candidates who are reflective of the community it serves.

Eligibility Criteria Guidelines

PERF reviewed PWCPD's Eligibility Criteria Guidelines for the Selection of Police Department Applicants, dated February 1, 2018. This internal document outlines criteria that disqualify a candidate from the hiring process, including criminal activity, drug use, traffic offenses, alcohol usage, prejudice, financial history, character and litigation, and body art. The document also outlines federal, state, and county requirements, including age, education, and citizenship requirements. Below we provide findings and recommendations related to the eligibility criteria.

Criminal Activity

PWCPD's eligibility criteria on criminal activity include minimum guidelines for police officers referenced in VA Code § 15.2-1705, including that an applicant must not have been convicted of a felony, misdemeanor sex offense, or domestic assault. In addition, PWCPD's eligibility requirements state that applicants must not have been convicted of "a crime that indicates a tendency to disregard the law." This criterion is vaguely worded and does not appear to be established under VA Code § 15.2-1705.

Recommendation: Define eligibility requirements more clearly. *PWCPD should ensure that eligibility requirements are clearly defined and do not allow for a wide range of interpretations by PWCPD hiring personnel. It is important that eligibility criteria are objective, in order to prevent opportunities for potential bias. PWCPD should clarify this statement, perhaps by providing examples of crimes that "indicate a tendency to disregard the law," so that all personnel bureau staff are in agreement about the meaning and intent of this criterion.*

Section I. Review of Personnel Bureau Documents

Eligibility requirements also state that the applicant “must not have any arrest or pattern of arrests that will degrade public confidence in the department.” This criterion also lacks detail and is subject to interpretation by hiring personnel.

Recommendation: PWCPD should provide examples of the types of arrests that could “degrade public confidence in the department” in order to make this criterion more objective and clearly defined. *This will ensure that this requirement is interpreted consistently by personnel bureau staff and across applicants. Examples might include assault and battery charges, or charges connected to excessive alcohol use by a candidate. These might be an indication that an individual is not suitable to be a police officer.*

Applicant Process Elimination Requirements

PWCPD lists several factors that can require that a candidate be eliminated from consideration:

- *Failure to comply with Departmental requests and appointments.*
- *Intentionally concealing or omitting information, or intentionally providing false or misleading information, related to any phase of the applicant process.*
- *Failure to be fully cooperative with the applicant investigator.*

Based on interviews with the Personnel Bureau, PERF learned that applicants can be disqualified for failing to show up for various phases of the hiring process, such as the physical exam. In addition, it became evident throughout site visits that PWCPD places a great deal of emphasis on integrity. Personnel Bureau staff explained that inconsistencies in information provided by applicants during various phases of the hiring process are considered “integrity issues,” and can be a basis for disqualification.

For example, if applicants provide information on their personal history statement that conflicts with information they provide during the polygraph interview, that can be an example of an integrity issue that may lead to disqualification. Although it is important to screen out applicants who are intentionally concealing information that would impact their ability to be an effective police officer, it is also to be expected that applicants will want to present themselves in the best possible light. In addition, applicants may in some cases genuinely recall information in later stages of the hiring process that they neglected to report initially. PWCPD should examine the types of integrity issues that result in elimination to ensure that candidates are not being disqualified who would potentially be valuable additions to the department.

Recommendation: Examine criteria on “concealing or omitting information”. *PWCPD should examine the types of reasons applicants are disqualified for “concealing or omitting information” during the application process. In general, if the omitted information does not in itself violate one of the eligibility requirements, PWCPD should not disqualify an applicant on that basis alone. (See pages 59-60 for examples of reasons applicants are disqualified.)*

Finally, the requirement that candidates be eliminated for “failure to be fully cooperative with the applicant investigator” is poorly defined. The PWCPD personnel bureau should examine the intent of this requirement to more clearly define it.

Section I. Review of Personnel Bureau Documents

Recommendation: *Ensure requirements are objective. PWCPD should examine its applicant process elimination requirements to ensure they are clearly defined, and do not inadvertently screen out applicants who would potentially make valuable additions to the department. PWCPD should provide examples of what it means to be “cooperative” with the applicant investigator, and include these examples in the eligibility requirements to ensure that all hiring personnel are aware of the meaning of this requirement. This will ensure that criteria are understood and applied objectively and consistently by all hiring personnel and background investigators.*

Employment Drug Policy

The Eligibility Requirements document outlines the types and levels of usage of various drugs that are prohibited by the department. The prohibitions include: marijuana use within one year preceding the date of application, other illegal drug use within seven years preceding the date of application, unauthorized use of prescription drugs within two years preceding the date of application, and use of anabolic steroids within three years preceding the date of application.

PWCPD’s focus on applicants’ relatively recent drug use, as opposed to lifetime use, is a good practice and ensures that applicants are not penalized for past behavior that may no longer be a reflection of their character. However, PWCPD may want to reconsider some of its drug-related requirements, especially pertaining to marijuana use.

PWCPD Action Taken: *As of the time of this report, PWCPD has revised its drug use rules to prohibit marijuana usage only after the date of application, as opposed to a year prior to the date of application. Timeframes for usage of other illegal drugs have been reduced from seven years to three years. In addition, PWCPD has eliminated the criterion on distribution of marijuana.*

Traffic Offenses

PWCPD’s eligibility criteria for traffic offenses state that applicants must not have more than six negative points against their driver’s license, and must not have a driving record that reflects irresponsible driving behavior. For out-of-state applicants, PWCPD should ensure that hiring personnel have a comparable standard to the six negative points.

Recommendation: PWCPD should ensure it has an equivalent eligibility criterion to the six negative points for applicants applying from outside the state of Virginia.

Alcohol Usage

Requirements for alcohol usage state that applicants must not have a conviction for a DUI within three years preceding the date of application. Additionally, applicants must not have a conviction for being intoxicated in public within one year preceding the date of application. These requirements appear reasonable and appropriate. PWCPD should ensure that areas of the application process, including the polygraph phase, accurately reflect these criteria.

Prejudices

Eligibility requirements state that applicants “must not harbor manifestations of prejudices or aggressive tendencies toward any class or group” and “must not display behavioral patterns that reflect bias

Section I. Review of Personnel Bureau Documents

toward any class or group.” While these are appropriate criteria, PWCPD should ensure it has a reasonable method for identifying these types of prejudices, as applicants are not likely to admit to them openly. PWCPD’s polygraph pre-test interview asks applicants questions to attempt to identify prejudice. In addition, PWCPD reviews applicants’ social media profiles during the background investigation, which is a good practice to identify any potential bias or prejudice that applicants may not disclose during the polygraph interview.

Financial History

PWCPD’s financial history requirements state that applicants “must not have a financial history that indicates an unwillingness to manage personal financial affairs.” This statement is vague and does not clearly convey the types of financial issues that would disqualify a candidate. In addition, this section states that applicants must be able to provide proof of payment or payment schedule of any collections.

Recommendation: Clarify requirements on financial history. *PWCPD should consider the types of financial issues that are serious enough to disqualify a candidate, and ensure that these criteria are clearly defined. An example of a financial issue that may be serious enough to warrant disqualification would be a history of debt linked to gambling, as this demonstrates poor decision-making and could indicate a vulnerability to extortion. Criteria should be objective and not subject to interpretation on the part of hiring personnel.*

In 2016, PERF worked with the COPS Office of the U.S. Department of Justice to convene a national conference on *Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer*. This meeting brought together law enforcement executives, human resources professionals, and other stakeholders to explore hiring rules and procedures for law enforcement. Participants acknowledged that historically, candidates with financial problems were often automatically disqualified from agencies’ hiring processes. While it is important to identify financial issues that may be an indication of grossly negligent or criminal activity, in today’s economy, agencies may want to adjust their thinking on personal finances and consider the underlying issues and their context.¹⁸

Recommendation: Avoid disqualifications of applicants for financial difficulties. *When considering applicants’ financial history, PWCPD should consider the reasons and implications of any unsatisfied debt before deciding to disqualify a candidate. In today’s economy, it is common for young people to have credit card debt, student loan debt, or any number of financial issues. However, this may not necessarily impact an applicant’s ability to be an effective police officer. In addition, since research has shown racial/ethnic and gender disparities in income, wealth, and financial challenges,^{19,20} focusing heavily on financial history may disadvantage these groups in*

¹⁸ U.S. Dept. of Justice and Police Executive Research Forum (2017). *Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success* (Page 18).

<https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0831-pub.pdf>

¹⁹ Addo, Houle, and Simon (2016). *Young, Black, and (Still) in the Red: Parental Wealth, Race, and Student Loan Debt*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12552-016-9162-0>

²⁰ Elmelech and Lu (2004). *Race, ethnicity, and the gender poverty gap*
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0049089X03000449>

Section I. Review of Personnel Bureau Documents

the hiring process. Applicants growing up in economically distressed neighborhoods or in families struggling with poverty may experience more financial challenges.

Character/Litigation

This section outlines criteria for applicants related to character and litigation. The eligibility requirements provide that applicants “must be of sound character as measured by qualities such as loyalty, responsibility, ability to function under stress, control of anger, maturity, and honesty.” While these are important traits to have, it is unclear how PWCPD would effectively measure some of them during the hiring process. PWCPD should establish objective criteria for these traits and ensure that they are more clearly outlined in the eligibility requirements.

Recommendation: Clarify criteria related to character traits. *PWCPD should examine the intent of these “character traits” to determine the types of relevant factors to look for during the hiring process. For example, if there are specific qualities that PWCPD feels demonstrate maturity and loyalty, PWCPD should provide examples in the eligibility requirements of these types of factors. This will help to ensure that requirements are objective and applied consistently across applicants. Importantly, these subjective criteria should be discussed with multiple members of the Personnel Bureau before a decision is made to disqualify an applicant based on character.*

Body Art

PERF did not find any issues with PWCPD’s body art requirements.

Federal, State, and County Requirements

This section outlines federal, state, and county requirements for law enforcement officers, some of which are established in VA Code§ 15.2-1705. To attract more applicants from diverse backgrounds, PWCPD may want to reconsider the requirement that applicants must be United States citizens. VA Code§ 15.2-1705 states that “Upon request of a sheriff or chief of police... the Department of Criminal Justice Services is hereby authorized to waive the requirements for qualification as set out in subsection A of this section for good cause shown.” PWCPD may be able to attract more diverse candidates if it considers applicants from immigrant communities.

Recommendation: Do not automatically disqualify applicants who lack U.S. citizenship. *A lack of U.S. citizenship should not be an automatic disqualifier for applicants. PWCPD should allow applicants who can legally work in the U.S. and are otherwise qualified to progress through the hiring process, regardless of U.S. citizenship. When candidates successfully complete the hiring process, PWCPD can then seek the exception from the state to waive the citizenship requirement. After these individuals are hired, they can then work toward obtaining citizenship. This may encourage more diverse candidates to apply who would otherwise be disqualified. As most agencies do require U.S. citizenship, this would be a progressive policy change by PWCPD to demonstrate its commitment to diversity.*

An example of an agency that hires legal status non-U.S. residents is Metropolitan Nashville Police Department. MNPDP will hire permanent legal residents of the U.S. who are honorably discharged veterans of the U.S. armed forces. This could be a starting point for PWCPD to begin hiring individuals who have not yet obtained U.S. citizenship.

Section I. Review of Personnel Bureau Documents

PERF identified a number of areas for improvement within PWCPD's eligibility criteria. PWCPD Personnel Bureau staff should review and revise the eligibility requirements as a group to ensure they are as clear and objective as possible. Going forward, these criteria should be reviewed and discussed annually with the chief of police, in order to discuss new issues that may emerge that unnecessarily prevent qualified persons from completing the application process.

PWCPD should also review all phases of the hiring process, in addition to the reasons why applicants are disqualified at each phase, to ensure they are consistent with the eligibility criteria (see sections I & II for further information). Once the eligibility criteria have been reviewed and finalized, this document should be included in the Personnel Bureau Manual, and Personnel Bureau staff should receive training on any changes. In addition, any criterion that will automatically disqualify an applicant from the hiring process should be made publicly available on PWCPD's website. This can help prevent candidates and PWCPD from wasting their time and effort.

Recommendation: Review and streamline all eligibility criteria. *In addition to implementing the recommendations above, PWCPD Personnel Bureau staff should review all eligibility requirements to ensure they are as clear and objective as possible, and should identify any criteria that automatically result in disqualification. Once the eligibility criteria have been reviewed and updated, they should be included in the Personnel Bureau Manual, and all Personnel Bureau staff should receive training on the criteria. Going forward, the eligibility criteria should be reviewed and discussed with the chief of police on an annual basis.*

Recommendation: Post eligibility requirements online. *PWCPD should make its eligibility requirements, especially those that will result in automatic disqualification, publicly available by posting them on the agency's website or including them in the job description for police officers. This will promote transparency and ensure that potential applicants are able to see whether they meet the eligibility requirements prior to submitting an application. This will also save time for PWCPD in reviewing applications that will ultimately be rejected.*

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

PERF conducted interviews with members of PWCPD's Personnel Bureau to understand the phases of the hiring process. Below is a description of the process, from when applicants submit an initial application to when they are hired.

- First, applicants are required to submit an online application through the agency's NEOGOV²¹ system.
- PWCPD's Administrative Specialist reviews these initial applications to determine whether the applicants meet certain minimum hiring guidelines (e.g., U.S. citizenship, age requirements).
- Applicants who make it through this phase of the process are asked to complete a Personal History Statement (PHS), which asks for more detailed information including personal, financial, and employment history. PWCPD's Recruitment Supervisor reviews the information provided in the PHS to determine whether there is any information that would disqualify the applicant based on the eligibility requirements discussed above.
- PWCPD holds monthly "BQ" (Better Qualified) Reviews, in which Personnel Bureau staff members meet as a group to review any candidates with issues that have emerged in the initial application screening or PHS that could potentially detract from the candidates' applications. These meetings ensure that each member of the Personnel Bureau can weigh in to ensure the hiring guidelines are being applied consistently. If there is a question about an applicant's eligibility or anything in their application that may need clarification, PWCPD can then follow up with the applicant for this information. These reviews are a good practice to ensure that the diverse perspectives of the Personnel Bureau staff can be heard, and that a single person is not responsible for disqualifying an applicant based on criteria that may be open to interpretation.
- Applicants who make it through the PHS phase are scheduled for a physical fitness test and polygraph examination. In the polygraph phase, applicants are asked further questions about their history, which is compared to the information they provided in the PHS to identify any information that may have been missed. Applicants cannot be disqualified solely based on the results of the polygraph test, but information they provide during this phase is considered in hiring decisions. Based on the information provided in the polygraph phase, the polygraph examiner writes a report for review by the Personnel Bureau Commander, who makes a decision as to whether the applicant should proceed with the hiring process.
- Applicants who make it through these phases are subject to a background investigation and psychological evaluation before being hired. The background investigation includes interviews of applicants' references, criminal, traffic, and credit checks, and finally an interview with the applicant. The psychological evaluation is conducted by an external licensed clinical psychologist, and includes a personality test and clinical appraisal interview. The background investigator writes a report on the applicant summarizing the investigation and makes a recommendation as to the applicant's suitability for employment.

²¹ NEOGOV is a human resources software tool used by many state and local jurisdictions for personnel management. <https://www.neogov.com/>

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

- From there, the first sergeant, lieutenant, and captain in the Personnel Bureau review and weigh in on the recommendation, and the Chief of Police has the final hiring authority.

Recommendation: Expand BQ Review to later steps in the process. *After the polygraph and background investigation, multiple members of the personnel bureau should review any decisions to disqualify candidates, especially in cases where the reason is subjective. Applicants who are at risk of being disqualified after these phases could be part of the BQ Review process described above, in which all members of the personnel bureau weigh in to ensure consensus and reduce potential bias.*

According to PERF interviews with PWCPD personnel, the entire hiring process from initial application to hiring typically takes about 10 to 12 weeks. **This is a relatively short amount of time compared to many police departments, and avoiding unnecessary delays is helpful to ensure that PWCPD is competitive with other agencies. Many applicants apply to multiple agencies and accept the first offer they are extended, so efficiency in the hiring process is important to attract more candidates.**

Applicant Data

PERF reviewed each phase of PWCPD's hiring process to explore where applicants are most frequently disqualified, and to identify any potential barriers that may prevent PWCPD from hiring demographically diverse applicants as well as applicants with a range of backgrounds and talents. To do this, PERF reviewed data about applicants who applied to PWCPD in approximately the two years preceding this report. Specifically, data was pulled from the NEOGOV system for FY 2019 (July 2018 – June 2019) and 10 months of FY 2020 (July 2019 through April 2020) on the number of applicants that were disqualified after each phase of the hiring process. Due to challenges with data availability (discussed in further detail on page 57), there was no easy way for PWCPD to pull data on the number of applicants who made it through each phase of the process. Therefore, assuming that applicants proceeded through the hiring process in the order described above, PERF calculated the number of applicants who made it through each phase of the hiring process, beginning with those who initially submitted an application and ending with those who were hired. This was accomplished by subtracting the number of applicants who were disqualified and those who withdrew after each phase of the process from the total number of applicants. **Figure 1 displays a chart of the number and percentage of applicants who made it through each phase of the hiring process between July 2018 and April 2020.**

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

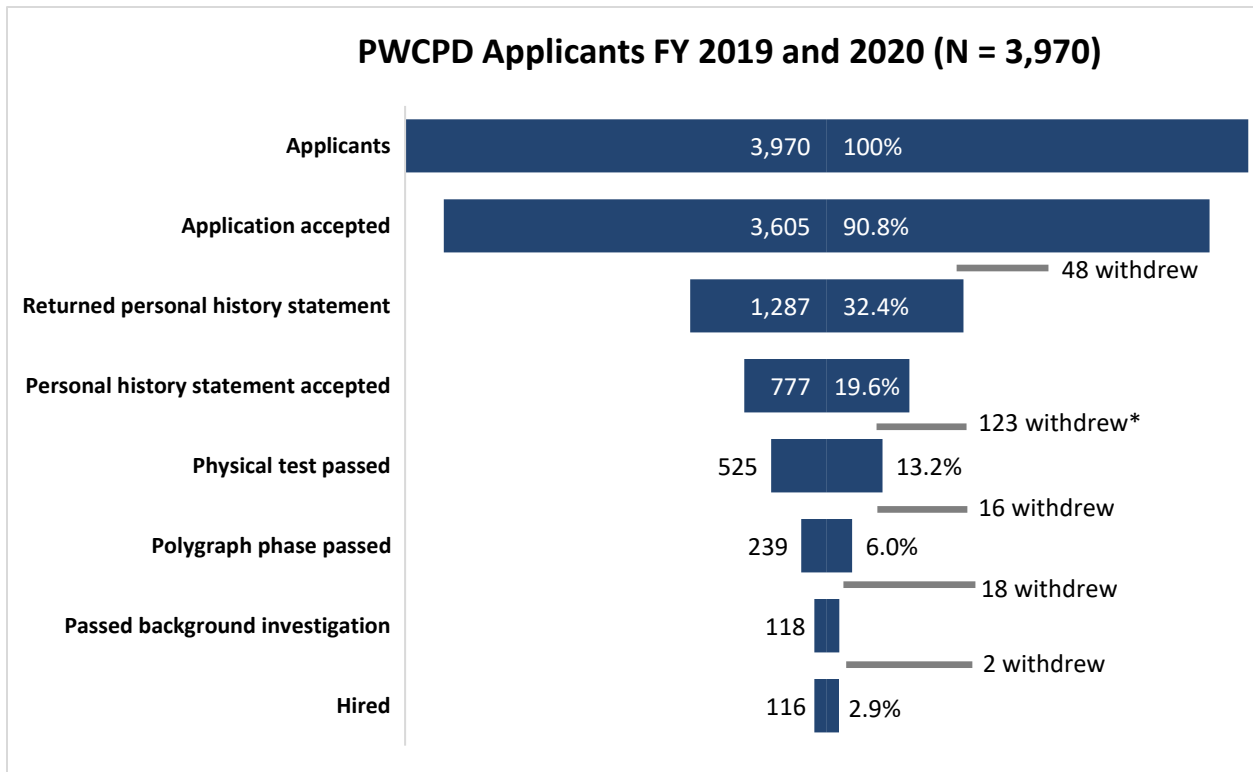


Figure 1

There were 3,970 total applicants to PWCPD between July 2018 and April 2020. As displayed in Figure 1, 3,605 of these applicants made it through the initial application phase and were provided with a Personal History Statement (PHS) form to complete.

However, only 1,287 applicants completed and returned the Personal History Statement. And many of those applicants were disqualified based on information they provided, so only 777 of the total applicants made it through the PHS phase.

(In addition to applicants who failed to complete various steps in the process or who were disqualified by PWCPD, a total of 207 applicants withdrew from the process voluntarily at various points. Applicants do not always explain their reasons for withdrawing, but some cite family issues or changes in their life circumstances.)

Among the 777 applicants who passed the Personal History Statement phase, 525 passed the physical exam; 239 successfully completed the polygraph phase; and 118 passed the background investigation. Ultimately, 116 applicants were hired.

In the following section, we examine each phase of the hiring process individually, and analyze the data by race and gender.

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

Applicants by Race and Gender

In this section, we explore the number and percentage of applicants who were disqualified, withdrew, or made it through each phase of the application process, broken down by race and gender.

In these graphs, the percentages reflect the percentage of the applicants at each phase of the process, as opposed to the percentage of all persons who filed an initial application.²² The X axes display the counts for reference. In general, the total number of applicants (i.e., the “N”) at each phase should correspond to the number of applicants who made it through the previous phase, unless otherwise stated.

PWCPD collects race/ethnicity data on applicants using the following categories: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, other, and unknown. Since there were such small percentages of applicants in the American Indian, “other,” and “unknown” categories, we combined these applicants into a single “other” category for purposes of this analysis.

Initial Applications Submitted

Figure 2 displays a chart of the total applicants who submitted an initial application, including those whose applications were accepted and those who were disqualified. Of the 3,970 applicants who submitted an initial application between July 2018 and April 2020, about 9% were disqualified.

Among all male applicants, 8.6% were disqualified at this phase, as compared to 11.4% of female applicants.

There did not appear to be substantial differences in the percentage of applicants who were disqualified at this phase by race/ethnicity. Among white, black, Hispanic and Asian males, the percentage of males who were disqualified was within a narrow range of 8.0% to 10.3%. Among females, a relatively high percentage of Asian applicants – 19.4% -- were disqualified. However, the absolute number was small, with only 7 Asian females being disqualified, so it is difficult to draw conclusions based on this percentage.

²² Since we only had data on the number of applicants disqualified after each phase, we calculated the number who made it through each phase by subtracting the number disqualified at each subsequent phase from the total number of applicants (assuming that applicants progressed through the hiring process in the order described above). Based on interviews with PWCPD personnel, there may be situations in which applicants complete the process in a slightly different order, which would impact the accuracy of our calculations. However, since the majority of applicants move through the process in the order described above, we can assume that our calculations are reasonably accurate for purposes of these analyses. See page 58 for further information on data challenges.

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

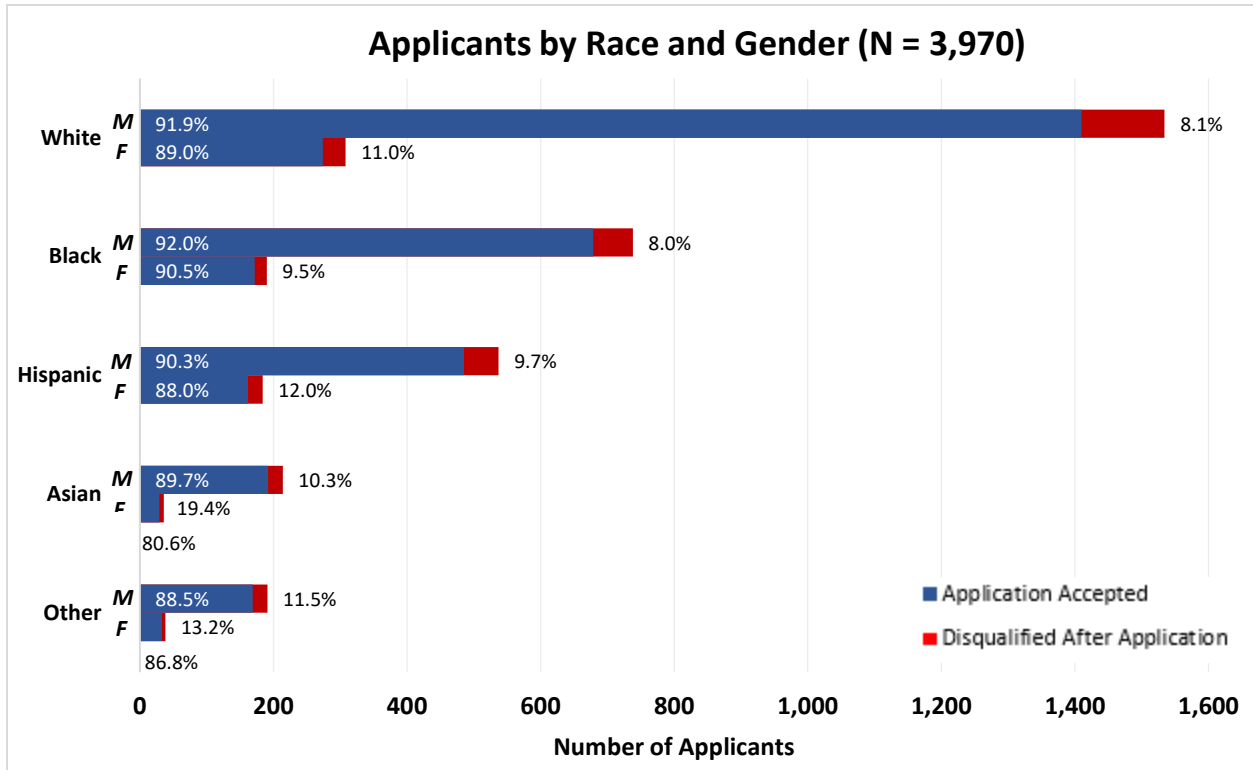


Figure 2

Application Form

PERF reviewed the [online application form](#) which is linked on the PWCPD hiring website. The application asks for general personal information and preferences on a few job-related questions, such as what shifts applicants are available to work. The form then asks applicants to enter information on their work and educational experience, including any certificates and licensures.

Finally, the application asks a series of questions including whether the applicant is a citizen, whether they meet the age requirements, and other background information. Some of these questions address PWCPD's established eligibility criteria guidelines. For example, there are questions about whether the applicant has been convicted of a crime, and the dates of the last time they used any illicit drugs. Because these would be disqualifying factors under PWCPD's eligibility requirements, it makes sense to ask these questions upfront, so that PWCPD can immediately screen out applicants who are not eligible for the position.

However, other questions on the initial application did not appear to be consistent with the eligibility criteria. For example, one question asks applicants whether they have ever been terminated or forced to resign from a job, or whether they have resigned in order to avoid being terminated. This question does not appear to reflect any of the established eligibility criteria. If being terminated from a previous job is a disqualifying factor for applicants, PWCPD should make this explicitly clear in the eligibility criteria. Furthermore, the Personal History Statement (PHS) would be a more appropriate place to ask this question, as it requires additional context and explanation.

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

Recommendation: Issues that require explanation should be explored at a point in the process when applicants can provide the explanation. *Questions that require further detail and follow-up such as whether the applicant has been terminated from a previous job, should be included at a later stage of the process, such as when the applicant is asked to complete the Personal History Statement, not in the initial application. In the PHS, applicants should be asked to fully explain the circumstances of the termination, and this information should be considered by Personnel Bureau staff during the “Better Qualified” review process.*

The application form also has a question about how the applicant learned about the job, so that PWCPD can measure the effectiveness of its various outreach efforts. This is a valuable question, and PWCPD should review the responses to this question to determine which of its outreach efforts are generating the most applicants.

Recommendation: PWCPD should continually review the responses to the question about how applicants learned about the job, and use this information to inform future outreach efforts.

Another question asks whether applicants have ever “sold, grown, manufactured or cultivated any illicit substances.” Under PWCPD’s previous eligibility criteria, having sold any illicit substances, including marijuana, was disqualifying. However, PWCPD has recently removed this criterion. The initial application should not include questions that would not objectively result in the disqualification of an applicant without further review. Rather, the initial application should solicit information that can be used to immediately screen out applicants without additional follow-up.

Recommendation: Move question about selling drugs to the Personal History Statement. *In accordance with the recommendation above, PWCPD should relocate the question “Have you ever sold, grown, manufactured or cultivated any illicit substances?” to the Personal History Statement. Further information about distribution or cultivation of illicit substances can be asked in later sections of the hiring process, and this information can be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.*

Applicants Given Personal History Statement (PHS)

Figure 3 displays a chart of the applicants who made it past the initial application screening and were asked to submit a Personal History Statement (PHS) (N = 3,605). Since only about one-third of applicants returned the PHS, PERF searched for possible racial or gender variations among those who did and did not submit the form. Figure 3 also displays the number of applicants who withdrew from the hiring process at this phase. (Those who “withdrew” contacted PWCPD to formally withdraw their application, as opposed to simply not returning the PHS form.)

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

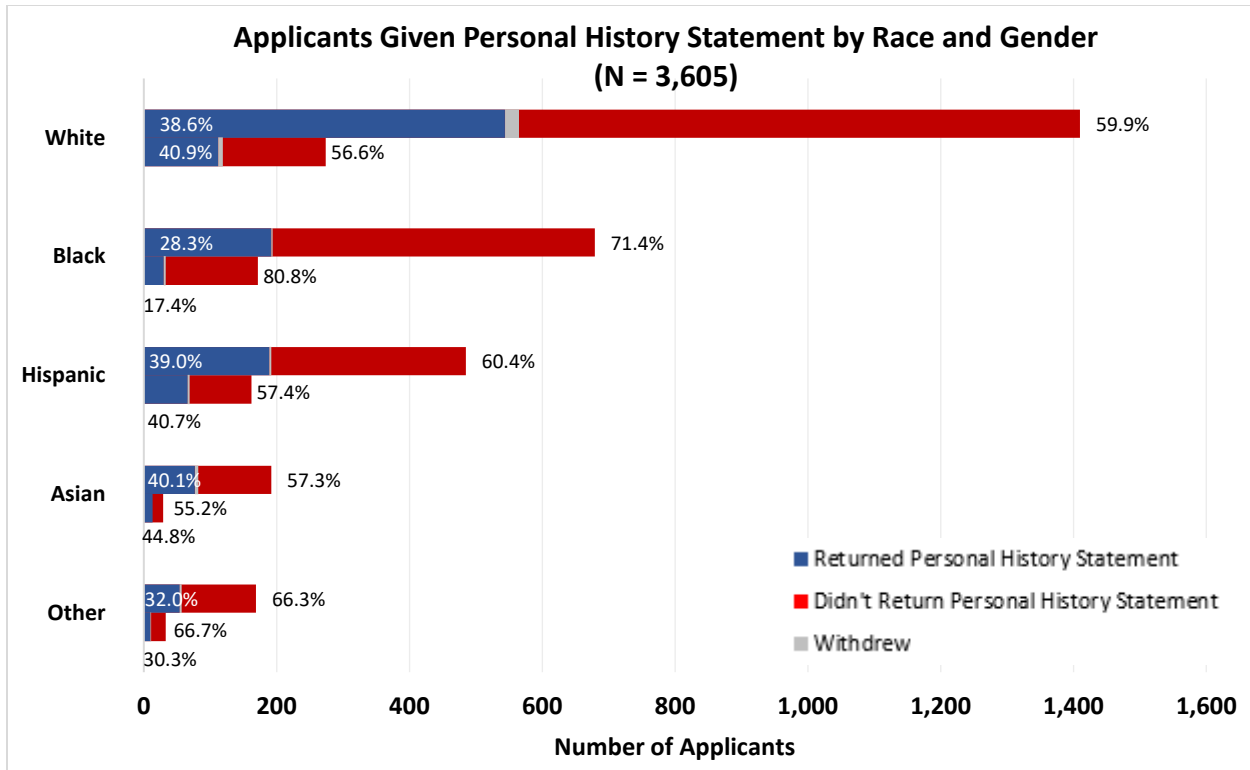


Figure 3

Across gender and racial/ethnic groups, a majority of applicants (64.3%) who were given the PHS did not return it.

Among male applicants (N=2,935), 61.4% of white males did not return the PHS, compared to 71.4% of black males, 60.4% of Hispanic males, 57.3% of Asian males, and 66.3% of males in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

Among female applicants (N=670), 56.6% of white females did not return the PHS, compared to 80.8% of black females, 57.4% of Hispanic females, 55.2% of Asian females, and 66.7% of females in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

For both male and female applicants, a larger proportion of black applicants did not return the PHS compared with other racial/ethnic groups. Black females were even less likely than black males to return the PHS, with over 80% failing to return the form. Although we do not know the reasons why black applicants were less likely to submit the PHS form, this suggests that the PHS is a barrier for black applicants more so than for applicants in other racial/ethnic groups.

Applicants failing to return the PHS represents the largest area in which PWCPD is losing applicants throughout the hiring process.

PWCPD currently has a process in place to follow up via email or phone with applicants who did not return the PHS to answer any questions they may have about the paperwork and assist them with completing it. In addition, PWCPD is asking applicants about the reasons they did not return the PHS. Consistent documentation of this information is a good practice, as it may help to identify barriers to applicants in completing the PHS, especially black applicants. PWCPD should ensure it is tracking this

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

information in its new software system going forward. This information can help to inform future hiring efforts and potential changes that may need to be made to the PHS form.

PERF survey of applicants who did not return the PHS

To better understand why applicants did not return the PHS, PERF created a brief online questionnaire for applicants who failed to submit the form (see Appendix A for a copy of the survey instrument). PWCPD's Administrative Specialist sent the survey via email to 819 applicants who applied to PWCPD between June 2019 and March 2020 but did not return the PHS. Respondents were instructed that all responses would be anonymous and would be provided directly to PERF. Overall, 128 (16%) individuals completed the survey.

The survey asked applicants the following question:

Why did you decide not to submit the personal history form after submitting your application? (Select all that apply)

- *I forgot to submit the form within the allotted timeframe*
- *The form was too long/burdensome*
- *I don't have the necessary documents requested*
- *I didn't think I would meet PWCPD's hiring requirements (please specify)*
- *I was hired by a different agency*
- *I decided I was no longer interested in pursuing a career at PWCPD (If so, why were you no longer interested?)*
- *I decided to pursue a career outside of policing*
- *Other reason (please specify)*

Figure 4 displays a chart of the responses to this question. Note that respondents could select more than one answer choice, so percentages do not total to 100.

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

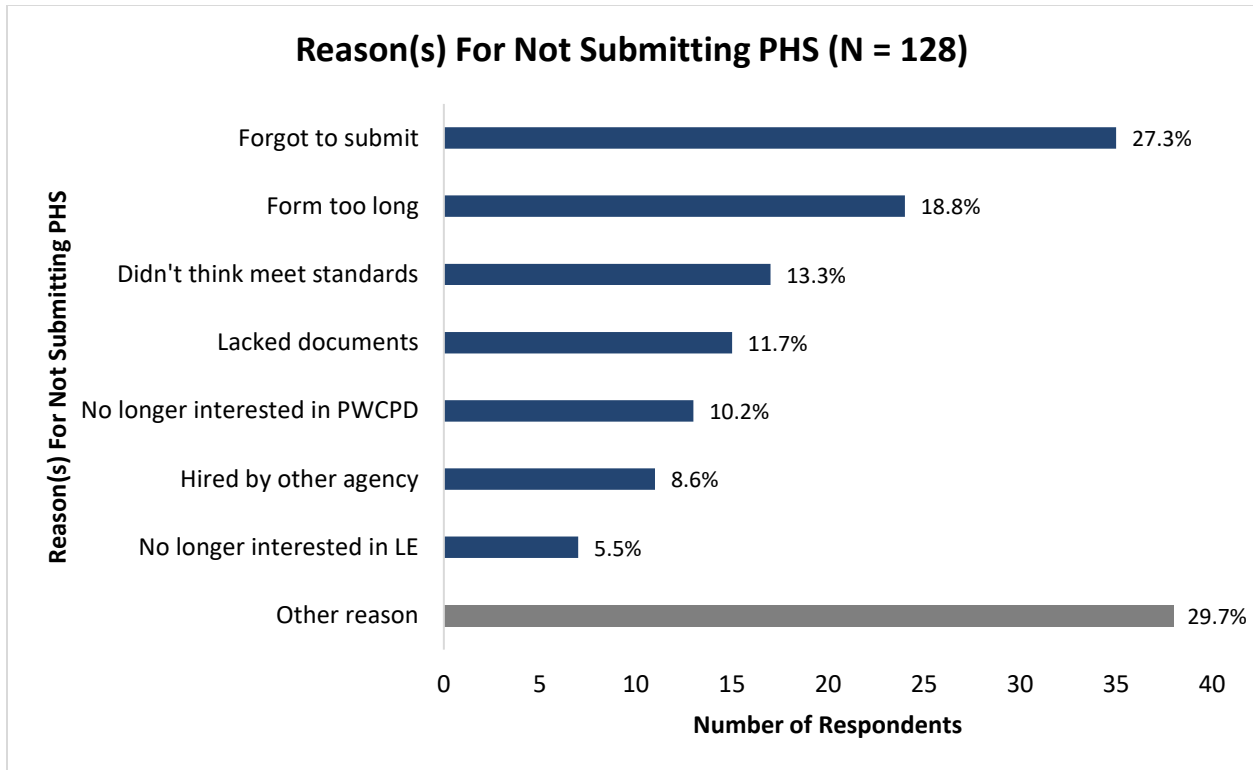


Figure 4

The most common reason reported for not submitting the PHS was that respondents forgot to submit the form within the allotted timeframe. Twenty seven percent of respondents (35) selected this response. Nearly one-fifth (24) of respondents indicated that the PHS was too long or burdensome, while 13% (17) respondents reported that they did not think they met the hiring requirements. For individuals who stated that they did not think they would meet the hiring requirements, the reasons provided included the following:

- Credit history
- Didn't think I would pass the physical
- My past history of being a victim of domestic violence and past drug usage
- My few speeding tickets and reckless driving. But in the military I was able to take an anti-terrorism evasive drivers course when I was on the generals staff drivers team.
- I have a tattoo on my hand and the PWC police has outdated standards. I served in the army for 6 years with a waiver for the tattoo but I can't be a police officer.
- Minor small things on my credit report and minor things on my criminal report from over 20 years ago. Nothing major, no assault, no domestic violence, etc.

While some of the respondents were likely correct about not being able to meet the requirements, some of these responses indicate a lack of understanding of PWCPD's eligibility criteria. This underscores the importance of being transparent about the eligibility guidelines by making them publicly available to applicants, as recommended on page 30. Some of these misperceptions about the eligibility criteria are concerning, and suggest that applicants may be deterred from proceeding with the hiring process based on factors that may not actually disqualify them.

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

For example, a number of respondents cited credit history as the reason they did not think they would meet the requirements. As recommended on page 28, PWCPD should carefully consider whether credit history should be a disqualifying factor, as negative credit history is more likely to affect some groups over others. In addition, it is concerning that one applicant thought her history as a victim of domestic violence would disqualify her. PWCPD must ensure that questions on the PHS do not mislead applicants to think that being a victim of a crime is a disqualifying factor (see page 45 for further discussion).

Recommendation: Remind applicants that PHS information will not necessarily disqualify them. *PWCPD should include a disclaimer on the PHS informing applicants that the information requested in the form will not necessarily be grounds for disqualification, and should direct applicants to review the eligibility criteria listed on the website for specific disqualifying factors. For example, applicants should be encouraged to apply even if they have credit issues or minor criminal history, as these are not automatic grounds for disqualification.*

The next most commonly cited reasons for not returning the PHS were that respondents lacked the required documentation (11.7%), were no longer interested in a career at PWCPD (10.2%), were hired by another agency (8.6%), or were no longer interested in a career in law enforcement (5.5%). About a third of respondents (29.7%) selected “other reason” for why they did not submit the PHS. Some of the most common specified reasons included: COVID delays, life circumstances changed, or they did not have time to complete the form due to other obligations. In addition, a few respondents reported that they did submit PHS form, but that they did not receive acknowledgement of their submission.

Recommendation: Provide more time for filing a Personal History Statement. *More than one-fourth of PERF’s survey respondents reported that they simply forgot to complete the PHS within the allotted timeframe. Currently, applicants have two weeks to complete the PHS form after they submit the initial application. PWCPD should consider increasing the timeline to a month, to encourage more applicants to submit the form.*

Recommendation: Use emails and/or phone calls to encourage applicants and show interest in them. *PWCPD should send reminder emails to applicants who have not yet submitted the PHS after two weeks to remind them to complete this phase of the process, and to encourage them by saying that the department looks forward to receiving their application. In addition, PWCPD recruiters should telephone applicants who have not yet submitted the PHS to follow up with them and answer any questions they may have about the hiring process. This will ensure applicants have personal contact with recruiters, which sends an important signal that PWCPD is an open, welcoming organization. Importantly, PWCPD should continue to track data on the number of applicants who fail to submit the PHS, in order to determine whether these reminders have a positive impact.*

PWCPD Action Taken: Based on conversations with PWCPD personnel, PWCPD has already taken steps to have recruiters follow up with applicants who do not submit the PHS. PWCPD personnel have reported that since doing this, they have seen more applicants completing the form.

Recommendation: Review and streamline PHS to reduce burden. *A number of survey respondents reported that they did not complete the PHS because it was too long or burdensome. PWCPD should review the information requested on the PHS to determine whether*

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

all the information requested is relevant and necessary, or if any of the questions can be removed or streamlined. Any questions that do not objectively correspond to PWCPD's eligibility requirements should be reconsidered (see section below for specific questions on the PHS that PWCPD may want to reconsider).

PWCPD Action Taken: *As of the time of this report, PWCPD has taken steps to streamline the PHS significantly.*

Recommendation: Work to ensure that misperceptions about eligibility do not cause applicants to drop out. *A number of respondents indicated that they did not think they met the eligibility requirements, and several of their perceptions about the eligibility requirements appeared to be incorrect. As recommended on page 30, PWCPD should post its eligibility criteria online to ensure transparency, and to ensure that applicants are not deterred from proceeding with the hiring process due to misperceptions about the requirements.*

Recommendation: Maintain detailed records of applicant submission information. *A few survey respondents reported that they did submit the PHS but did not receive confirmation of their submission. PWCPD should maintain detailed records of applicant information throughout the hiring process to ensure that no application materials are missed. In addition, adopting applicant management software would allow for more comprehensive and accurate tracking of application materials, and could notify applicants automatically that their materials have been received (see recommendations on applicant tracking on page 58 for further information).*

PWCPD Action Taken: *As of the time of this report, PWCPD has contracted with eSOPH to adopt applicant tracking software, which will allow the agency to maintain detailed records of applicant submission information and materials.*

In the following section, we discuss the questions on the PHS form and how they can potentially be improved to be more consistent with PWCPD's hiring goals.

Applicants Who Returned the PHS

Figure 5 displays a chart of the applicants who returned the PHS by race and gender (N = 1,287), along with the percentages of applicants whose PHS was accepted, and those who were disqualified based on their PHS.

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

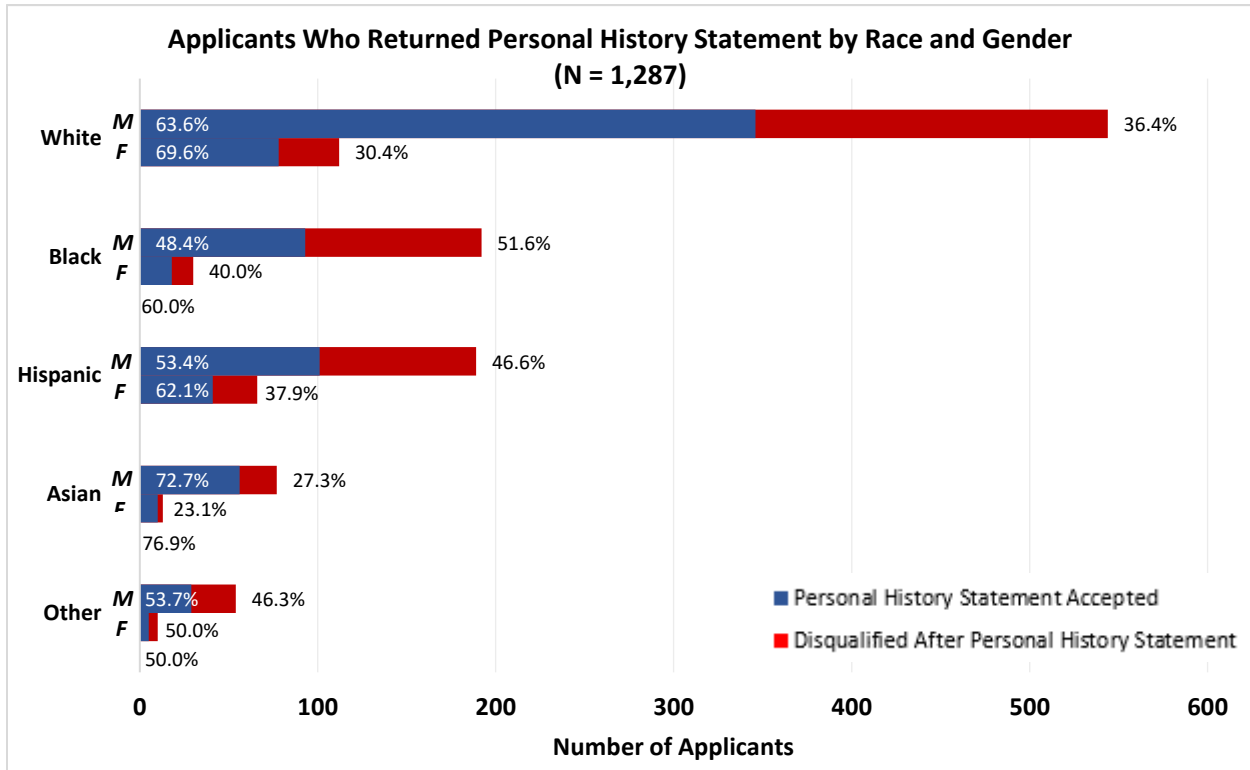


Figure 5

Among male applicants (N = 1,056), 36.4% of white males were disqualified after submitting the PHS, compared to 51.6% of black males, 46.6% of Hispanic males, 27.3% of Asian males, and 46.3% of males in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

Among female applicants (N = 231), 30.4% of white females were disqualified after submitting the PHS, compared to 40% of black females, 37.9% of Hispanic females, 23.1% of Asian females, and 50% of females in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

Black and Hispanic applicants were more likely to be disqualified at this phase than white applicants, and this was especially true of black and Hispanic males. **This suggests that the information requested on the PHS, or the way this information is interpreted in the hiring process, may have an adverse effect on Black and Hispanic applicants.**

Recommendation: Review information requested in PHS for relevance. *PWCPD should review the information requested in the PHS to determine whether all of the information requested is relevant and reflective of an applicant's ability to become an effective police officer. Information solicited in the PHS should be objective and should not allow for a wide range of interpretation by hiring personnel in determining which applicants should be disqualified (see examples of specific PHS content below).*

Recommendation: Applicants' personal information should be removed when reviewing Personal History Statements. *The individual responsible for reviewing the PHS forms should not be aware of an applicant's personal information, such as race or gender, when reviewing their PHS, to reduce the possibility of bias.*

Section II. Review of Hiring Process

Recommendation: Collect data on the reasons applicants are disqualified at the PHS phase.

PWCPD should collect data on the reasons applicants are disqualified at the PHS phase by race and gender to determine whether any PHS questions have an adverse impact on specific groups. If certain questions are identified that are more likely to result in the disqualification of Hispanic or Black applicants, for example, PWCPD should reconsider these questions.

PWCPD Action Taken: *As mentioned previously, PWCPD has adopted application tracking software which will facilitate the collection of data regarding the reasons applicants are disqualified at each phase of the process. This will allow the agency to assess which aspects of the hiring process, including specific PHS questions, may have an adverse impact on various racial/ethnic groups.*

[PERF Review of the Content of the PHS](#)

PERF reviewed the contents of the PHS to compare them to PWCPD's eligibility requirements and identify potential barriers to applicants. PWCPD has recently split the PHS into two parts in an attempt to reduce the length of the form and to keep applicants more engaged throughout the process. While this is a positive step, PWCPD should continue to review the PHS to determine whether further improvements can be made to reduce the burden to applicants.

For example, the form states that the completed PHS, along with the requested documents, should be mailed or hand-delivered to the Police Personnel Bureau. The majority of today's applicants value efficiency and are accustomed to electronic methods of communication. Particularly in the COVID-19 environment, hand delivery, or requiring applicants to visit a Post Office, is out of sync with public health practices. More generally, requiring applicants to hand-deliver or mail the PHS may send the message that PWCPD is inefficient or behind the times, which may deter applicants in the current generation from wanting to proceed with the application process.

Recommendation: PWCPD should provide applicants with the option to submit the PHS online or via email. *Having to mail or deliver all of the required documentation to PWCPD may be challenging to some applicants and may deter them from wanting to proceed with the process. PWCPD should also consider allowing applicants to scan their documentation and send it via email to the Personnel Bureau. Further, adopting comprehensive applicant tracking software would allow for the PHS to be submitted online in a single system (see pages 57-58 for further information).*

PWCPD Action Taken: *PWCPD's eSOPH system will allow for the PHS and other application materials to be submitted online, which will reduce the burden for applicants.*

[PHS Questions](#)

PERF reviewed each question on the PHS and provided feedback and comments to PWCPD on questions that may need further review. In this section, we summarize general issues in need of consideration regarding the PHS.

The first page of Part 1 of the PHS asks for personal information including name, address, and date of birth. The following page asks applicants for financial information. One of the first questions in this section asks whether the applicant is responsible for paying any court-ordered child support, and

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whether child support payments are up to date. While obtaining information on applicants' financial background is important, having this as the first question may send the message that PWCPD does not look favorably on applicants who pay child support, and may deter applicants from wanting to proceed any farther with the application.

Part 2 of the PHS asks for further financial information, instructing applicants to "list all debts and financial responsibilities (include mortgages, rents, credit cards, monthly bills, and student and auto loans)." As discussed in section I, it is reasonable to assume that many of today's applicants will have some level of credit card and/or student loan debt. While it is important to know whether applicants have serious financial issues that may reflect an unwillingness to honor personal obligations, it is also important to consider an applicant's financial information in the broader context of their life circumstances as a whole.

Recommendation: Remove questions on financial history. *Because most of this financial information will be available in an applicant's credit history, PWCPD should remove these questions from the PHS and simply review this information during the background investigation. If any areas of concern emerge from an applicant's credit history, PWCPD can inquire about those issues during the background investigation.*

Another section of the PHS asks about applicants' employment information, including a list of previous employment experience and employers. However, PWCPD already asks for this information on the initial application form. There are several additional questions related to employment that are asked both on the initial application and on the PHS. For example, there are questions that ask whether applicants have ever resigned from a job after being informed that they would be terminated, or resigned without providing two weeks' notice. PWCPD should eliminate redundancy by asking for this information either in the initial application or in the PHS, but not both. Asking applicants for this information twice may give the impression that the application process is inefficient, and reflect negatively on the department's image.

Recommendation: Eliminate repetitive questioning. *PWCPD can streamline the application process by only asking for employment information in the PHS. This will reduce the burden both for applicants and hiring personnel reviewing the application information. PWCPD also should ensure that questions on the PHS reflect specific eligibility criteria. Questions that are not reflective of any criterion for eligibility should be reconsidered.*

Other sections of the PHS ask about driving information and criminal information. Question #30 instructs applicants to "Provide an accurate record of **ALL** traffic violations or citations you have ever received (this includes camera enforced violations)." Asking applicants for an exhaustive list of all driving citations may be unreasonably burdensome for most applicants to obtain. For example, one survey respondent reported that the reason he did not submit the PHS was because he was asked to go to the courthouse to get his driving record from 15 years ago, and did not have time to go as he could not get time off from his job. In addition, since this information will be sought during a driving check, it is unnecessary to ask for this information in the PHS.

Recommendation: Remove the question about traffic violations. *PWCPD should remove this question from the PHS. Information on driving violations or citations should be obtained during the background investigation.*

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Question #34 asks applicants “Have you ever had **ANY** contact with any law enforcement authority? (i.e. reporting a crime, as a witness, bystander, domestic dispute, person of interest, etc.?)” The instructions further specify to “provide concise details of each incident, including approximate date, circumstances of the contact and the name of the officer with whom you dealt with.” Asking applicants to report “any” contact with law enforcement is unrealistic, especially for applicants living in communities that may experience more frequent contact with police. Furthermore, individuals who have been the victim of a crime may not feel comfortable reporting this on an application form, and it is unclear why this information would be relevant. Asking applicants for an exhaustive list of law enforcement contacts is unreasonably burdensome and may discourage applicants from continuing the process.

Recommendation: Revise question about “any” law enforcement contact. *PWCPD should revise this question to ask only about incidents in which applicants were notified that they were the suspect or target of an investigation. Reporting a crime or being a witness or bystander should not be relevant to hiring decisions. PWCPD should ensure that information solicited on the PHS is relevant and necessary for hiring decisions, and consistent with eligibility criteria.*

Another section of the PHS asks for information on substance use. Specifically, question #37 asks whether the applicant has used any of a list of substances within the past seven years. PWCPD’s eligibility criteria on drug use (described in section I above) provide the timelines for usage of various substances, which range from one year to seven years. Since the eligibility criteria provide that certain drugs (e.g., marijuana, anabolic steroids, prescription medication) can be used within a shorter timeframe, it is unclear why the PHS asks applicants to report use of these substances for the last seven years.

Recommendation: Revise the section about substance use history. *PWCPD should revise this section of the PHS to be consistent with eligibility requirements on drug use. Specifically, the PHS should only ask whether applicants have used various drugs within the established timeframes outlined in the eligibility criteria.*

Finally, Part 2 of the PHS asks applicants for residential information, instructing applicants to list their residences for the last 10 years and provide the names of, and present addresses for, two nearest neighbors for each address. This information may be difficult or impossible to track down for many applicants, especially those who have moved more than once or twice. Furthermore, applicants living in communities that historically have been distrustful of law enforcement may be hesitant to provide contact information for neighbors and former neighbors who may not want to be contacted by the police.

Recommendation: Revise question requesting contact information for previous neighbors. *PWCPD should revise this question to ask for contact information of two neighbors, roommates, or associates for the last five years “if available.” Questions that are overly burdensome may deter applicants from wanting to proceed with the process.*

Overall, PERF identified a number of questions on the PHS that did not seem to correspond to PWCPD’s stated eligibility criteria, or that were duplicative of information solicited elsewhere in the hiring process. PWCPD should review eligibility requirements and the information asked in the PHS and other phases of the process to identify objective criteria that will eliminate unsuitable candidates from the hiring process. If there are questions asked on the PHS that are not consistent with those eligibility

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criteria, PWCPD should revise or remove these questions from the PHS. In addition, PWCPD should streamline the PHS to remove any information that will be solicited elsewhere in the hiring process. This will reduce the burden associated with completing the PHS, which may encourage more applicants to complete the form.

Applicants Assigned to the Physical Fitness Test

Applicants who make it through the PHS phase of the hiring process are next assigned to take the physical fitness exam. Of the 777 applicants who made it through the PHS phase of the process, 79 withdrew, leaving 698 applicants who were assigned to the physical exam.

Figure 6 displays a chart of these 698 applicants who were assigned to the physical fitness exam between July 2018 and April 2020, by race and gender. Of the applicants that were assigned to the physical fitness exam, not all of them necessarily took the exam (e.g., some applicants withdrew prior to attempting the exam or were disqualified for not showing up to the exam). Applicants have two attempts to take the exam, so it is also possible to withdraw after attempting the exam but before passing it. It is important to note that applicants who failed to show up for the physical exam are included in the applicants “disqualified” at this phase, as opposed to those that withdrew.

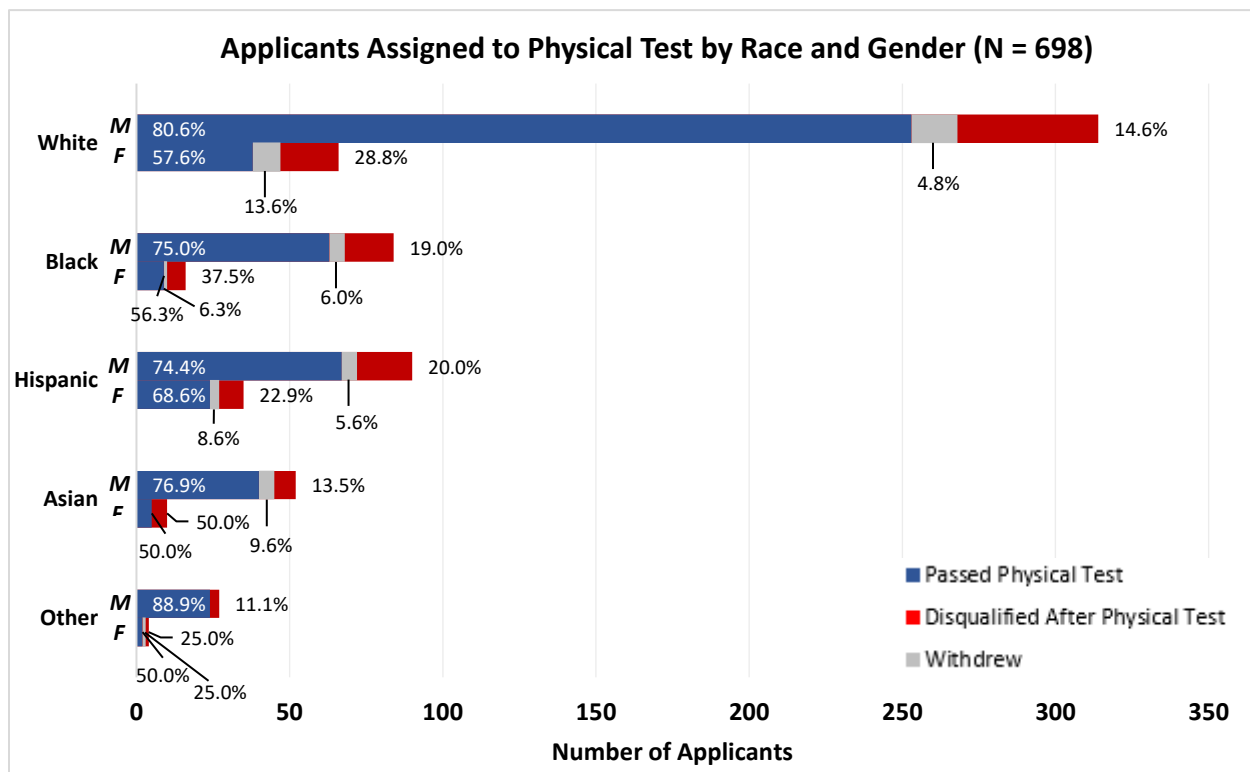


Figure 6

Among male applicants who were assigned to the Physical Test (PT) (N = 567), 19.4% of white males either were disqualified or withdrew, as compared to 25% of black males, 25.6% of Hispanic males, 23.1% of Asian males, and 11.1% of males in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

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(Note that these percentages also include applicants who failed to show up for the physical exam.)

Among female applicants who were assigned to the PT (N = 131), 42.4% of white females either were disqualified or withdrew, as compared to 43.8% of black females, 31.5% of Hispanic females, 50% of Asian females, and 50% of females in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

Overall, nearly double the proportion of female applicants (29.7%) were disqualified after being assigned to the PT as compared to male applicants (15.9%). Female applicants were also more likely to withdraw after being assigned to the PT than males (10.7% vs. 5.3%, respectively). Since applicants can take the PT test another time if they do not pass initially, withdrawals at this phase may also be an indication that applicants are not confident in their ability to pass the exam.

The Elements of PWCPD's Physical Fitness Test

Most law enforcement agencies utilize some form of physical fitness test that must be successfully completed as part of the application and academy graduation process. However, there is little consistency when it comes to the type of testing process used and the standards that must be met. In the greater Washington/Baltimore region, PERF found that large city and county law enforcement agencies use different types of exercises, including a run, push-ups, sit-ups, or an obstacle course.

PWCPD uses a combination of exercises to evaluate physical fitness in the application process, including the following requirements:

- **3-minute step test** measuring heart rate and recovery period (for males, less than 148 beats per minute and for females, less than 172 beats per minute)
- **1.5 mile run:** Complete a 1.5 mile run within 17 minutes
- **Bench Press:** Bench press at least 60% of body weight
- **Push-ups:** Complete at least 13 push-ups in one minute
- **Sit-ups:** Complete at least 24 sit-ups in one minute
- **300 meter sprint:** Complete a 300 meter sprint within 76 seconds
- **Vertical jump:** Jump at least 12 inches from a standing position.

According to interviews with PWCPD personnel, these standards were developed based on criteria established by the Cooper Institute for Aerobic Research, a nonprofit organization that focuses on wellness and fitness to improve public health. The Cooper Institute has developed exercises and standards that are used by many federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.²³ This type of assessment is designed to evaluate the fitness level of the candidate and does not reflect job-specific abilities needed to perform the physical tasks required by law enforcement officers.

When PERF observed one PWCPD's PT tests, we noticed that several female candidates did not pass the test by a small margin, mainly because they did not pass tests of upper-body strength. Research has shown that female applicants are often disproportionately disadvantaged by physical fitness requirements, and there is little evidence that these requirements are reflective of the skills required to be a police officer.²⁴

²³ <https://www.cooperinstitute.org/vault/2440/web/files/684.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/252963.pdf>

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The State of Virginia has no mandates requiring a fitness test in the application process, graduation from the academy, or for active-duty officers. Some departments have employed a different approach to the PT test that is more reflective of actual tasks that will be performed on the job. These tests are usually comprised of an obstacle course or agility test.

For example, the Virginia State Police uses a 150-yard obstacle course with 10 obstacles that must be completed within 1 minute and 36 seconds.²⁵ The Fairfax and Arlington County Police Departments have similar physical agility tests that require applicants to wear a weighted vest, similar to the ballistic vest and gun belt worn by officers, while completing several tasks. Applicants are given a suspect description at the beginning of the test. They then must complete tasks including a 75-yard run, jumping over a wall, clearing several curbs, and carrying or moving a weight or dummy, and are then asked to repeat the suspect's description.²⁶ These tests are designed to simulate real-world tasks and scenarios, such as a chase, apprehension, or rescue that would be performed on the job, as opposed to traditional fitness requirements that may not be related to the duties of a police officer.

PWCPD's eligibility criteria list the following physical requirements for police officers:

- *Must be able to support the weight of the duty belt and ballistic vest (weighted between 20 lbs-40 lbs);*
- *Must be able to wear and operate a department issued full face, tight fitting respirator, as well as successfully pass an annual FIT Test;*
- *Must be able to physically restrain or subdue individuals;*
- *Must be able to perform under emergency conditions which often involves considerable personal hazard to include individuals with weapons;*
- *Must be adaptable to perform under stress when confronted with situations that involve running, walking, standing, stooping, crawling, dragging, lifting, climbing, pushing and raising objects over one's head;*
- *Possess constant mental faculties to maintain concentration and make appropriate decisions in stressful situations.*
- *Physical Duties*
 - *Sitting/standing up to 10 hours per day;*
 - *Support of extra weight up to 40 lbs for 10 hours per day;*
 - *Walking up to 2 miles per day (10 hours);*
 - *Stooping up to 4 hours per day;*
 - *Climbing (ladders, inclines, stairs, etc.);*
 - *Kneeling for extended periods of time;*
 - *Lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling and dragging heavy weight.*

PWCPD's current PT test requirements are not reflective of the physical requirements listed in the eligibility criteria. Additionally, it appears that PWCPD's current PT test requirements are having an adverse effect on female applicants.

²⁵ <https://policeacademyhub.com/virginia-police-academy-requirements/>

²⁶ For an example of the Arlington Police Department's Physical Abilities Test, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDsiUsv1Q0>.

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Recommendation: Revise the physical fitness test to reflect the real-world tasks in policing.

PWCPD should revise its physical fitness standards to ensure that they do not disproportionately disadvantage female applicants. This should include revising the department's physical requirements to make them more reflective of the duties that police officers perform on the job, specifically those listed in the eligibility criteria. This could include wearing a duty vest while completing an obstacle course, including running, walking, crawling, dragging, and climbing, among other tasks.

Currently, applicants are allowed to take the PT test up to two times. If they fail the test twice but still want to become a police officer, they must begin the application process again. PWCPD does provide practice sessions for the PT test, which is a promising practice. However, PWCPD should allow applicants to take the PT test an unlimited number of times until they pass. This is done in several large county police departments in the Washington Metropolitan area, including Fairfax County Police Department, and ensures that applicants can continue to practice the skills necessary to pass the test.

Recommendation: Allow candidates to retake the physical fitness test. *PWCPD should allow applicants to retake the PT test as many times as needed in order to pass the test.*

Applicants Assigned to Polygraph Phase

After passing the physical fitness test, applicants are typically assigned to the polygraph phase. This phase includes a pre-test interview, the polygraph test, and can potentially involve follow-up interviews if any issues are identified that need further clarification.

Figure 7 presents a chart of the applicants who were assigned to the polygraph test by race and gender (N=525), including the numbers and percentages of those who passed, were disqualified, and withdrew after being assigned to this phase. Applicants can withdraw after being assigned to the polygraph phase but before completing the interview. Alternatively, since there can be multiple phases of the polygraph process (e.g., follow-up interviews), applicants can withdraw during the interview phase, but before it is complete.

Although polygraph results often are not admissible in court due to their unreliability, many police departments use the polygraph as a tool to identify potential issues that may not be discovered during other phases of hiring process. **In PWCPD's hiring process, applicants cannot be disqualified simply for failing the polygraph test**, but information that applicants provide in the pre-polygraph interview can result in applicants being disqualified. The applicants disqualified at this phase are those who revealed information during the process that is inconsistent with PWCPD's eligibility requirements. PWCPD should ensure applicants are made aware of the reasons they are being asked to take a polygraph, so that the test does not intimidate or deter them from proceeding with the hiring process.

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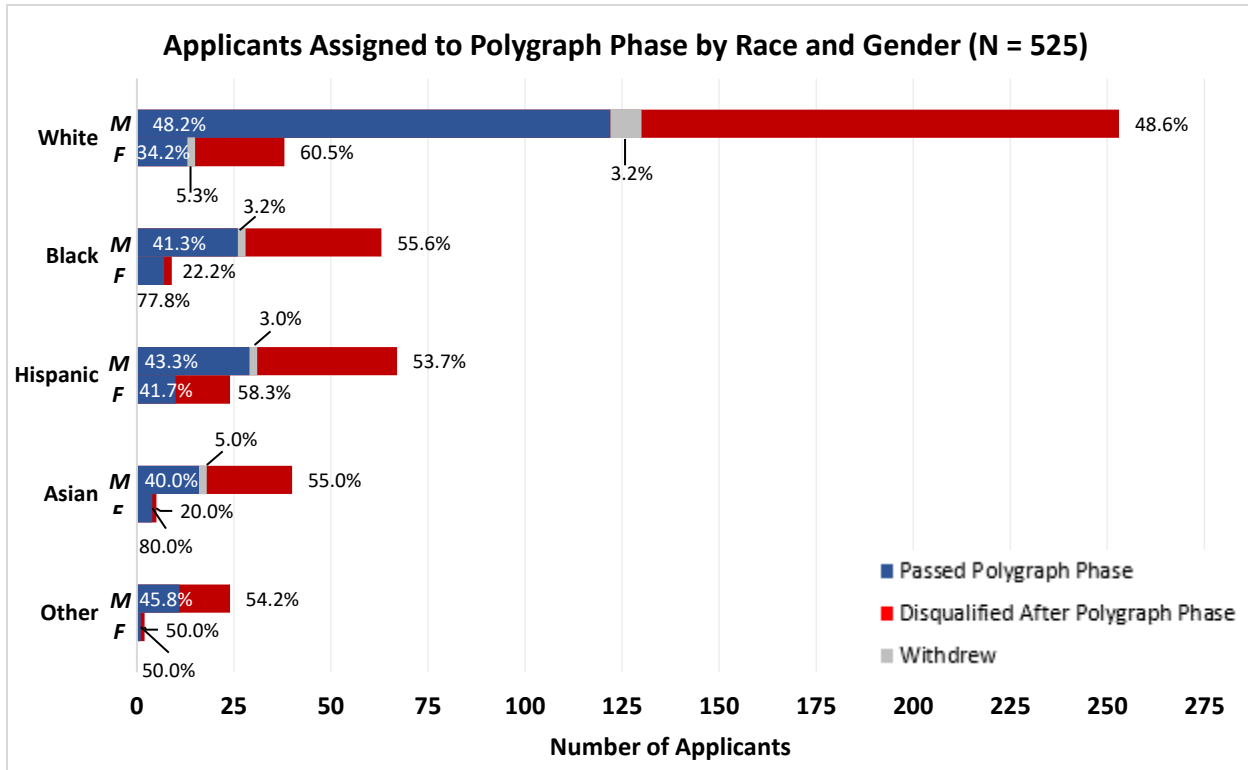


Figure 7

Among male applicants (N = 447), 48.6% of white males were disqualified after the polygraph phase, as compared to 55.6% of black males, 53.7% of Hispanic males, 55% of Asian males, and 54.2% of males in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups. Thus, it appears that non-white males were slightly more likely than white males to be disqualified at this phase.

Among female applicants (N = 78), 60.5% of white females were disqualified after the polygraph phase, as compared to 22.2% of black females, 58.3% of Hispanic females, 20% of Asian females, and 50% of females in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups.

The number of females who made it to the polygraph phase of the hiring process is relatively low, so it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the proportion of females in various racial/ethnic groups who were disqualified at this phase.

However, it appeared that white females *may* be slightly more likely than their male counterparts to be disqualified at this phase. PWCPD should collect data on the specific reasons that applicants are disqualified during the polygraph process to explore any potential barriers to applicants based on race/ethnicity and gender. In the following section, we review the specific questions asked in the polygraph pre-interview.

Recommendation: Continually review data on the number of applicants who are disqualified during the polygraph phase, broken down by race/ethnicity and gender.²⁷ *This data should be tracked over time to identify any trends in the proportions of various groups who are disqualified*

²⁷ Obtaining applicant tracking software, as discussed on pages 57-58, will assist with this.

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after this phase. In addition, PWCPD should collect data on the specific reasons applicants are disqualified during the polygraph phase, and should examine this data to identify any potential barriers to applicants based on race/ethnicity and gender that may be occurring during this phase of the process.

Recommendation: Review and consider polygraph pre-interview questions. *PWCPD should examine any specific questions in the polygraph pre-interview that may pose barriers to applicants, especially minority applicants, and should consider changes that may prevent possible bias in this process. Information asked in the polygraph pre-interview should be objective and consistent across applicants to limit any potential opportunities for bias on the part of the polygraph examiner. In general, if the information asked in the polygraph pre-interview does not directly correspond to PWCPD's stated eligibility criteria, then PWCPD should consider removing or revising these questions.*

PWCPD Action Taken: *As of the time of this report, PWCD has removed a number of unnecessary and irrelevant questions from the polygraph pre-interview to significantly streamline this phase of the process.*

Recommendation: Carefully consider disqualifications for "integrity" issues. *During interviews, PWCPD staff explained that applicants often are disqualified during the polygraph phase because they provide information during the pre-interview that is inconsistent with information previously provided, thus indicating an issue with "integrity." In reviewing the reasons applicants are disqualified during this phase of the process, PWCPD should pay close attention to these integrity related issues to ensure they are objective and are not disproportionately affecting some applicants over others. In assessing these types of issues, PWCPD should consider whether these inconsistencies are severe enough to compromise an individual's ability to be an effective police officer, or if there may be a reasonable explanation for the inconsistent information provided. (See pages 59-60 for further information about the types of reasons applicants are disqualified).*

Polygraph Pretest Interview Questions

Prior to the polygraph test, applicants are given a pre-test interview that consists of "questions designed to detect important aspects of the applicant's character and work-related behavior."²⁸ The interview asks about similar information provided on the Personal History Statement, including employment and educational history, driving history, criminal history, illegal sexual activity, and character traits, among other topics. PERF reviewed the questions on the pre-test interview and provided feedback and comments to PWCPD on some of the questions that may need further review. In this section, we summarize some of the general issues for PWCPD to consider with regard to the polygraph pre-test interview.

In reviewing the questions in the pre-test interview, it appeared that a number of the questions did not correspond to PWCPD's eligibility requirements, and the relevance of some of the questions was

²⁸ Personnel Bureau Recruitment and Selection Manual, 2016

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unclear. For example, PERF does not believe the following questions appear to have any relevance to the hiring process:

- *Have you ever traveled abroad?*
- *Are you currently having any problems with your spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend and/or closest friend?*
- *Any previous marriages? Any child support issues?*
- *Have you ever requested that a criminal record be sealed or expunged?*
- *What were you afraid I would ask a question about during this interview that we have not yet discussed?*
- *How many drinks does it take to make you moderately intoxicated?*
 - *Number of times in the past 12 months [applicant has been moderately intoxicated]?*
- *In one sentence describe how you initially react when you become angry?*
- *Do you have a vehicle? Who makes the car payments?*
- *What is the worst thing you have ever done in your life?*
- *What is your biggest regret while intoxicated?*

Recommendation: Ensure that pre-test interview questions are connected to eligibility requirements. *PWCPD should ensure that questions asked on the pre-test interview are consistent with established eligibility requirements. Any questions that are not reflective of the eligibility requirements or would not result in disqualification of an applicant should be reconsidered for inclusion on the pre-test interview. Importantly, PWCPD should not include questions in the pre-interview that seem designed to intimidate applicants.*

Similar to the Personal History Statement, there are a number of questions on driving and financial history in the polygraph pre-test interview that solicit information that will be obtained later, during the background investigation. For example:

- *In the Personal History form, did you list all traffic violations or citations to include parking tickets, you have received?*
- *Do you have any bills currently listed in collections?*
- *Have you ever had an unpaid bill sent to collections?*
- *How would you describe your credit rating?*

Recommendation: Remove redundant questions. *Information that will be obtained through driving record checks and credit checks can be removed from the polygraph pre-test interview. If any issues emerge in these areas, they can be followed up on during the background investigation.*

The pre-test interview also asks about criminal behavior, and some of the questions are duplicative of information that is solicited on the Personal History Statement. For example:

- *Have you ever been questioned by the police?*
 - *Stopped and questioned...business card left for you? Interviewed as a witness or person of interest?*

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Recommendation: Revise question about being questioned by the police. *As recommended for the Personal History Statement, PWCPD should revise this question to only ask whether applicants have been notified that they were a target of an investigation. It is unreasonable to expect applicants to report any type of contact with the police.*

The following questions on the pre-test interview ask about various illegal behaviors. However, considering the context and severity of these offenses, PWCPD should consider whether these questions should result in automatic disqualification from the hiring process (see section on “reasons applicants were disqualified” for more information).

- *Have you ever purchased a false identification card?*
- *Have you ever committed any act of shoplifting?*
- *Have you ever provided/purchased alcohol to subjects underage?*

Recommendation: Remove these questions from the pre-interview. *These low-level criminal behaviors should not in themselves be grounds for disqualification from the hiring process. PWCPD should therefore remove these questions from the polygraph pre-interview, and should follow up on this information during the background investigation.*

The following questions ask about criminal history and drug use of applicants’ friends and family members. Although PWCPD’s eligibility criteria prohibit certain drug use and criminal activity, these behaviors on the part of friends and family members should not necessarily disqualify an applicant from the hiring process.

- *How many friends do you have that currently use illegal drugs? If so when is the last time you observed them using illegal drugs?*
- *Do you have any family members that use illegal drugs?*
- *When was the last time you were exposed to any illegal drug use?*
- *Has any member of your immediate family been charged with a crime?*

Recommendation: Do not disqualify applicants for actions of friends and family members. *The drug use of friends and family members should not necessarily disqualify an applicant, as the behavior of an individual’s friends and family should not reflect poorly on that individual. In addition, asking if a member of someone’s family has been charged with a crime may send the wrong message, and PWCPD may lose valuable applicants if this information is used as grounds for disqualification. PWCPD should therefore remove these questions from the polygraph pre-interview.*

The following questions appeared vague, and could use some additional clarification:

- *Have you ever sent, or exchanged an obscene photograph by cell phone or email? Internet?*
- *Are you currently involved in a personal relationship which could affect your employment or cause embarrassment to this department?*

Recommendation: Clarify meaning of “obscene”. *PWCPD should clarify the meaning of “obscene” in the first question. Sexual photographs exchanged by consenting adults should not be of any concern to PWCPD. If this is what is meant by “obscene photographs,” this question should be removed from the polygraph pre-test interview.*

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Recommendation: Clarify question on personal relationships. *PWCPD should clarify what is meant by “a personal relationship which could affect your employment or cause embarrassment to the department” and provide examples, as the intent of this question is unclear.*

Similar to the Personal History Statement, the polygraph pre-test interview asks about illegal drug use. Since substance abuse history is already requested in the PHS, PWCPD can simply follow up on the information provided during the polygraph phase to verify that it is accurate. This will streamline the process and reduce repetitive questioning.

Recommendation: Eliminate repetitive questioning on drug use. *Instead of asking applicants for an exhaustive list of prior drug use on the polygraph pre-interview, PWCPD can instead simply ask applicants whether the information they provided on the PHS with regard to drug use is accurate.*

The questions above are just some of the areas that, based on PERF’s review, should be reviewed and evaluated by PWCPD. PWCPD polygraphers who are specifically trained in conducting these interviews should review the questions in the pre-test interview to ensure they are consistent with the eligibility criteria, and justify why each question is relevant and necessary to the hiring process. This will ensure there is agreement on the criteria that should be considered, and that should potentially lead to disqualification of an applicant.

Recommendation: PWCPD polygraphers should review each question in the polygraph pre-test interview to assess relevance and consistency with the eligibility criteria. *Polygraphers should provide justification to personnel bureau leaders as to why certain questions are necessary and how they are relevant to established eligibility criteria. Any questions that are determined not to be relevant should be revised or removed.*

Recommendation: The polygraph process should be subjected to an ongoing review, including a review of the questions being asked and the factors or decision points that result in applicants being rejected or dropping out of the recruitment process. **A decision to reject a candidate should not be made by a single person, but rather by a diverse panel of PWCPD Personnel Bureau leaders such as those currently involved in the BQ process.**

Applicants Who Complete the Background Investigation

Applicants who successfully complete the polygraph phase are assigned to receive a background investigation. The background investigation includes a criminal history check, a credit history check, a traffic history check, and interviews with personal and professional references. The background investigation phase also includes a psychological evaluation that is conducted by an external licensed, clinical psychologist.

Of the 239 applicants who were assigned to a background investigator, 18 withdrew before the background investigation was complete. Figure 8 presents a chart of the applicants who completed the background investigation by race and gender (N = 221), including those who passed and those who were disqualified.

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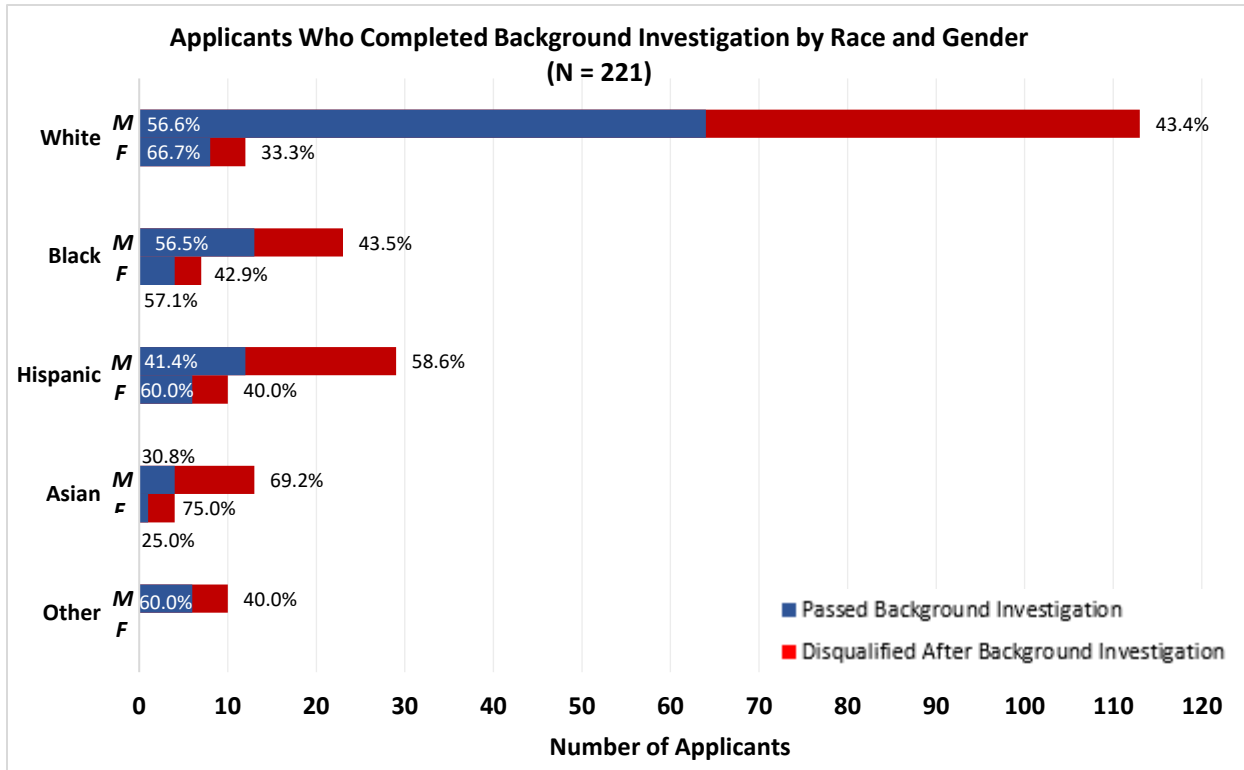


Figure 8

Because the number of applicants who made it to the background investigation phase was relatively small, we did not attempt to compare the proportions of applicants who were disqualified in each racial/ethnic group. Instead, we collapsed the racial/ethnic groups into white and non-white categories to compare by race and gender. Among male applicants, 43.4% of white males were disqualified after the background investigation, as compared to 53.3% of non-white males. Among female applicants, 33.3% of white females were disqualified after the background investigation, as compared to 47.6% of non-white females. Note that there were only 33 total females who completed the background process, so we may not be able to make generalizations about the proportions of females who were disqualified by race/ethnicity.

Recommendation: Continue to monitor data on disqualifications in the background investigation phase. *PWCPD should continue to collect and analyze data on the specific reasons applicants are disqualified during the background phase to determine whether any part of the process has an adverse effect on particular racial/ethnic groups. Adopting eSOPH software will assist with tracking of applicant data and reasons for disqualification by race/ethnicity and gender. If such disparities are discovered, PWCPD should consider whether areas of the background investigation phase should be revised.*

In addition, any reasons for disqualification that could be subject to interpretation should be reviewed by a diverse group of hiring personnel in the BQ review process, in order to prevent potential bias.

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Applicants Hired

Overall, 116 of the 3,970 total applicants (2.9%) who applied to PWCPD between July 2018 and April 2020 were hired.²⁹ Figure 9 displays a chart of the total applicants hired by race and gender. The percentages reflect the applicants in each category who were hired as a percentage of the total number of applicants in that category who submitted an initial application.

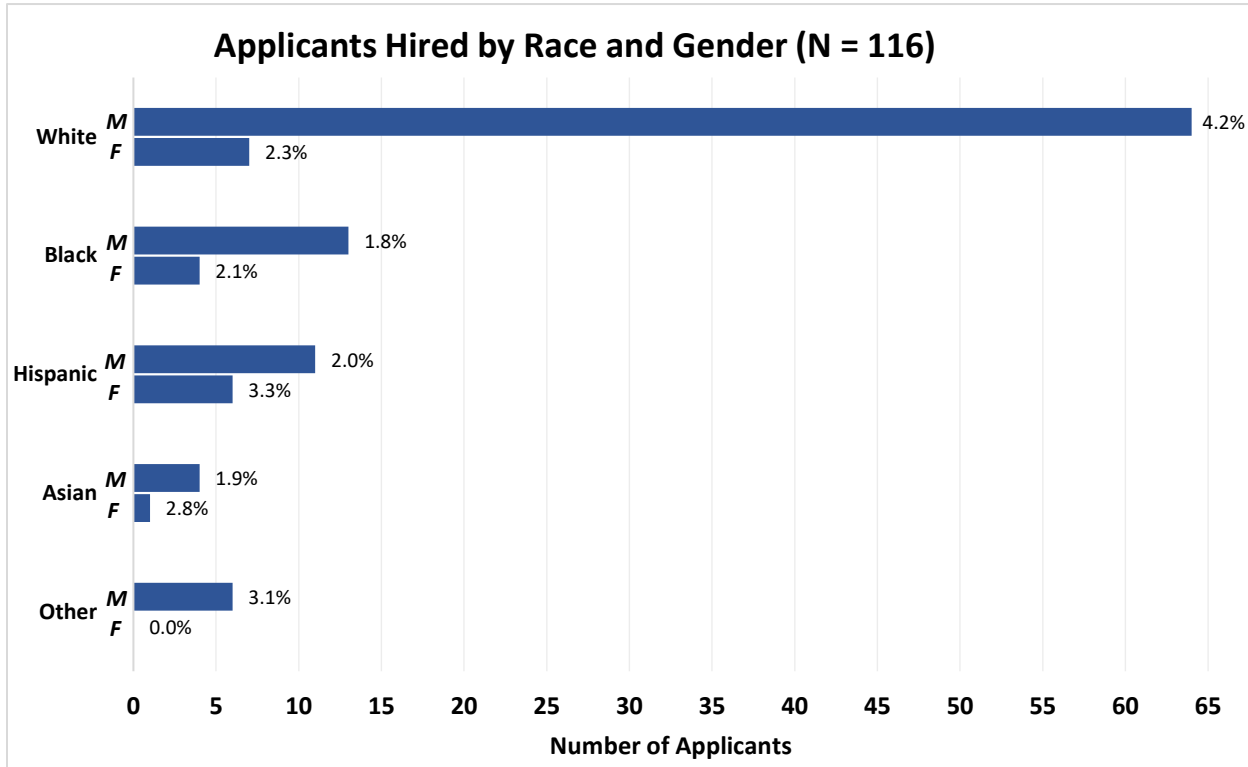


Figure 9

Compared with the overall percentage of 2.9% of applicants being hired, it is notable that 4.2% of white male applicants were hired. But in all other demographic categories, the hiring rate was either below or just slightly above 2.9%. Black and Asian applicants of both genders were less likely to be hired than white applicants, as were Hispanic males.

PERF identified some racial/ethnic and gender disparities in its review. **This is an area of concern and merits continued examination and follow-up to identify any barriers that might adversely impact applicants.** PWCPD should collect comprehensive data on the applicants who are disqualified at each phase of the process by race/ethnicity and gender to track these trends over time.

Adopting formal application tracking software will assist with this data collection. Going forward, PWCPD should review each phase of the hiring process and the reasons why applicants are disqualified at each phase.³⁰ If certain phases are found to have an adverse impact on applicants of specific racial/ethnic groups or genders, PWCPD should consider revising these phases. Importantly, PWCPD

²⁹ Of the 118 applicants who made it through the background phase, two withdrew.

³⁰ On page 61, we provide some preliminary findings on the reasons applicants were disqualified from the hiring process, but due to a lack of detailed data, we were not able to identify the reasons at each specific phase.

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should establish clear and objective criteria for eligibility and hiring and make sure these criteria are reflected throughout each phase of the hiring process, including the Personal History Statement, polygraph, physical fitness test, and background investigation.

In the following section, we discuss the preliminary findings about the reasons applicants were disqualified during the hiring process.

Application Tracking and Data Challenges

PWCPD does not currently have a formal software system that allows for comprehensive collection and analysis of applicant data. According to interviews with PWCPD personnel, although applicant information is collected in the NEOGOV system, this system does not allow for the querying of applicant data, and there is no easy way to pull even basic data from the system on an aggregate level.

For example, PERF requested data on the number of applicants disqualified at each phase of the hiring process by race and gender. This required PWCPD personnel to manually pull the information from each applicant's individual record in the system, and was very labor-intensive and inefficient.

PERF learned that PWCPD is currently tracking application data informally in a series of Excel spreadsheets. PWCPD's recruitment supervisor maintains a spreadsheet with information on the applicants who have submitted a Personal History Statement, and the selection supervisor maintains a spreadsheet with information on applicants who have been assigned to the background investigation. These spreadsheets contain applicant name and demographic information, as well as brief comments on why applicants are disqualified. However, since each sergeant is entering the data manually, there is little consistency between the two spreadsheets, and it is not possible to track applicants from one phase of the process to another.

Finally, there is a third spreadsheet known as the Background Investigation Status Log. This is apparently the most comprehensive tracking spreadsheet and is maintained by PWCPD's Administrative Specialist. Similar to the other spreadsheets, it contains applicant name, demographic information and position applied for, as well as the date(s) they were assigned to various phases of the hiring process. This spreadsheet includes information on applicants who have submitted a Personal History Statement through the physical fitness test, polygraph, and/or background investigation (if applicable). The Administrative Specialist updates this spreadsheet with brief comments on the reasons applicants are disqualified, which are pulled from the NEOGOV system.

While this spreadsheet may be sufficient for PWCPD's internal tracking purposes, there are several limitations to the spreadsheet. For example, the spreadsheet only tracks applicants who have already submitted the Personal History Statement, and does not contain information on those who did not return the PHS. Based on the way the data is entered in the spreadsheet, it is difficult to tell at which point of the process candidates were disqualified (see section below for further information). In addition, each *application* (as opposed to applicant) is entered as a new row of the spreadsheet. Since applicants can apply more than once, there is no mechanism to identify and distinguish individual applicants from one another. Finally, as the data is hand-entered into the spreadsheet, there are many opportunities for human error, and the spreadsheet is not updated in real time.

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Recommendation: Adopt application tracking software. *PWCPD should adopt formal applicant tracking software that will allow for the tracking of applicants from the time they submit an initial application through each subsequent phase of the hiring process. This will allow PWCPD to accurately identify at which phases applicants are being disqualified, as well as any trends in race, ethnicity, gender, or other variables that may suggest opportunities for improvement. In addition, this software will allow for all applicant information, including the initial application and Personal History Statement, to be submitted via a single system. One example of such a software system, eSOPH, is being used by departments such as the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, DC, where it has dramatically reduced the agencies' data processing time.*

PWCPD Action Taken: *As previously mentioned, PWCPD has contracted with eSOPH as of the time of this report, which will greatly improve efforts to track application data and reasons for disqualification.*

Reasons Applicants Were Disqualified

Despite the difficulties in data collection discussed above, PERF explored the specific reasons applicants were disqualified from the hiring process. PWCPD provided PERF with the spreadsheet that is used to track applicants throughout the hiring process. The spreadsheet contains applicant name, race, gender, position applied for, and the dates they were assigned to various stages of the process. The spreadsheet also contains comments on the various reasons applicants were disqualified (if applicable) from the hiring process. We specifically focused on the applicants who were disqualified for purposes of this analysis.

Methodology

The Background Investigation Status spreadsheet tracks applicants who have submitted a Personal History Statement (PHS) through the physical fitness (PT) test, polygraph, and background phases. The spreadsheet does not contain dates of when applicants submitted their initial application. However, it contains a column labeled “date assigned” which, according to PWCPD personnel, represents the date that applicants were either: 1) notified that they were disqualified based on the PHS; 2) assigned to the PT test; or 3) assigned to the background investigation. Because the dates in this column are updated and overwritten as applicants progress through each phase of the process, it was difficult for PERF to discern at which phase each applicant was disqualified.

However, since the “date assigned” column contained the most comprehensive date information in the spreadsheet, we selected applicants with a “date assigned” that fell between January 1, 2018 and May 18, 2020 for purposes of this analysis. We specifically reviewed applicants who applied for a sworn police officer position during this timeframe.

According to the spreadsheet, there were 1,386 applications with a “date assigned” between January 1, 2018 and May 18, 2020. Some individuals applied to the department more than once during the nearly two-and-a-half-year period. Since each application (as opposed to applicant) is entered in a new row of the spreadsheet, this number may contain individuals more than once if they applied more than once during the timeframe.

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Despite these limitations of the data, PERF moved forward with the analysis based on the information available. We randomly selected 675 (approximately half) of the applications that met the aforementioned criteria to explore the reasons the applicants were not hired.

Many applications had multiple reasons listed in the comments for why they were disqualified from the hiring process. We classified these reasons into broad categories, using PWCPD's eligibility criteria as a guide. Below is a description of the various categories that PERF created. Note that this analysis includes the reasons applicants were disqualified at any phase of the process from the Personal History Statement through the background phase. Going forward, PWCPD should collect specific information on the reasons applicants were disqualified at each phase of the process, as recommended above.

Categories and Descriptions of Reasons for Disqualifications:

- **Did not meet basic qualifications**: Applicant did not meet the basic qualifications for employment. Examples include not having a high school diploma or GED, not being a U.S. citizen, and not being able to speak or write English at a proficient level.
- **Failed PT test**: Applicant failed the physical fitness test.
- **Failed psychological exam**: Applicant failed the psychological screening exam.
- **Medical**: Applicant was unable to get the required medical clearance.
- **No contact/no show**: Applicant ceased their involvement in the hiring process without notice (for example, did not show up for the physical test).
- **Withdrawal**: Applicant withdrew from the hiring process.
- **Body art**: Applicant has tattoos, piercings, or other disqualifying body modifications.
- **Criminal Behavior**: Applicant admitted to, was a suspect in, was arrested for, and/or was convicted of a crime. Crimes include, but are not limited to, simple assault, possession of fake ID, arson, theft, fraud, and sexual assault. Intoxicated driving (DUI) is *not* included in this category; it is categorized as an alcohol issue (see below). Arrestable traffic violations (e.g. hit-and-run) are *not* included in this category; they are categorized as driving issues (see below).
- **Work/employment**: Applicants with work or employment issues. Examples include quitting without two weeks' notice, poor performance appraisals, and terminations.
- **Finances**: Applicants with financial issues, e.g. accounts past due. For example: "multiple accounts past due"; "2 charged off accounts and one account over 120 days past due."
- **Traffic/Driving**: Examples included points on license, citations, and license suspensions. Intoxicated driving (DUI) is *not* included in this category. Instead, it is categorized as an alcohol issue (see below).
- **Drugs**: Applicants who used, abused, or unlawfully distributed any controlled substance, including marijuana, other illicit drugs, and prescription drugs. Unlawful use of steroids is categorized in the sub-category "other illicit drugs."
- **Academic/school**: Applicant had issues related to an academic setting related to grades, cheating, or discipline.
- **Contact with law enforcement**: Applicant had contact with law enforcement which was not otherwise categorized. For example: "Multiple contacts with [law enforcement] not [disclosed] on Personal History Statement."

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- **Domestic:** Applicant was party to a negative incident or series of incidents of a domestic nature which did not rise to the level of a crime. For example: “Domestic incident with [family member].”
- **Gang affiliation:** Applicant is or was affiliated with a gang.
- **Civil:** Applicant has or had civil law issues, e.g. being party to an ongoing civil suit or respondent in a protective or restraining order.
- **Alcohol:** Applicants with general or specific issues related to alcohol use and abuse. Examples include intoxicated driving, frequent consumption, excessive consumption, and consuming alcohol at inappropriate times (e.g. at work) or places (e.g. in public).
- **Mental/behavioral health:** Applicant had mental or behavioral health issues. Examples include suicide attempts, emergency psychological holds, and anger management issues. This category does not include people who failed the psychological screening exam.
- **Lying, or omitting or providing misleading information:** Applicant lied, omitted, or provided misleading information at any point in the process. Some examples of reasons listed include: “Integrity-intentionally tried to outwit the background process”; “multiple [traffic violations] not on PHS”; “inconsistent information given about drug use to different agencies during application process.” Note that if an applicant provided misleading information about drug use, for example, this would be counted in both the “lying” and “drug use” categories. Therefore, lying or omitting information is rarely the sole reason an applicant is disqualified.
- **Character:** PERF observed some reasons listed that did not appear to correspond to specific eligibility criteria, but could best be categorized under “character.” For example, a number of reasons listed included associating with friends or family who had engaged in drug use, or “exposure” to drug use. Lack of “maturity” was also often cited as an issue.
- **Prejudice:** Applicant admitted to having prejudice or made statements or actions indicating that they had negative feelings towards one or more groups.
- **Unknown:** No reason for disqualification listed in spreadsheet.
- **Other:** Issue cited could not otherwise be categorized. For example: “did not return missing forms,” and “Has a hard time following directions; disorganized.” Many of these reasons said “see file” or “see poly,” and thus the team was unable to categorize them.

Since many of the applications in the spreadsheet had more than one reason for disqualification listed, each application could be counted in more than one category. If an application had multiple reasons listed that fell into a single category, we only counted this once for that category. For example, an applicant who was disqualified for frequent cocaine and marijuana use and having seven points on their drivers’ license would be counted *once* in the “drugs” category and *once* in the “traffic/driving” category.

Findings

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of applications (N=675) that had a reason listed in each category. Since each application can be counted in more than one category, percentages do not total to 100.

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Reasons Applications Were Disqualified (N=675)

Reason	Number	Percent
Lie/omit/mislead	212	31.4%
Crime	165	24.4%
Work/employment	147	21.8%
Traffic	132	19.6%
Drugs	129	19.1%
Withdrawal	87	12.9%
No contact/no show	72	10.7%
Finances	66	9.8%
Alcohol	56	8.3%
Character	48	7.1%
Other	42	6.2%
Contact with LEO	26	3.9%
Academic	23	3.4%
Unknown	21	3.1%
Failed PT	19	2.8%
Basic qualifications	15	2.2%
Mental/behavioral health	14	2.1%
Domestic	12	1.8%
Civil	10	1.5%
Body art	9	1.3%
Medical	7	1.0%
Gang	6	0.9%
Failed psych test	6	0.9%
Prejudice	3	0.4%

Table 1

PERF also looked at the distributions of these categories by race/ethnicity and gender to see whether certain groups were more likely than others to be disqualified for various types of reasons. Table 2 displays the number and percentage of applications by race/ethnicity that had reasons listed in particular categories.

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Reasons Applications Were Disqualified, by Race/Ethnicity (N=675)

	White (349)		Hispanic (128)		Black (113)		Asian (43)		Other (42)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Lie/omit/mislead	111	31.8%	33	25.8%	48	42.5%	9	20.9%	11	26.2%
Crime	81	23.2%	34	26.6%	28	24.8%	11	25.6%	11	26.2%
Work/employment	68	19.5%	26	20.3%	31	27.4%	8	18.6%	14	33.3%
Traffic	60	17.2%	23	18.0%	32	28.3%	7	16.3%	10	23.8%
Drugs	71	20.3%	22	17.2%	22	19.5%	8	18.6%	6	14.3%
Withdrawal	45	12.9%	21	16.4%	11	9.7%	5	11.6%	5	11.9%
No contact/no show	35	10.0%	13	10.2%	15	13.3%	4	9.3%	5	11.9%
Finances	28	8.0%	15	11.7%	18	15.9%	1	2.3%	4	9.5%
Alcohol	36	10.3%	5	3.9%	2	1.8%	1	2.3%	4	9.5%
Character	29	8.3%	6	4.7%	3	2.7%	3	7.0%	1	2.4%
Other	35	10.0%	7	5.5%	10	8.8%	0	0.0%	4	9.5%
Contact with LEO	14	4.0%	5	3.9%	6	5.3%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%
Academic	12	3.4%	4	3.1%	3	2.7%	1	2.3%	3	7.1%
Unknown	12	3.4%	3	2.3%	4	3.5%	2	4.7%	0	0.0%
Failed PT	8	2.3%	5	3.9%	2	1.8%	4	9.3%	0	0.0%
Basic qualifications	5	1.4%	7	5.5%	1	0.9%	2	4.7%	0	0.0%
Mental/behavioral health	6	1.7%	2	1.6%	4	3.5%	1	2.3%	1	2.4%
Domestic	8	2.3%	2	1.6%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%
Civil	7	2.0%	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Body art	6	1.7%	1	0.8%	2	1.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Medical	3	0.9%	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%
Gang	3	0.9%	2	1.6%	0	0.0%	1	2.3%	0	0.0%
Failed psych test	4	1.1%	0	0.0%	1	0.9%	1	2.3%	0	0.0%
Prejudice	2	0.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.3%	0	0.0%

Table 2

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Table 3 displays the number and percentage of applications by gender that had reasons listed in particular categories.

Reasons Applications Were Disqualified, by Gender (N=675)

	Female (122)		Male (553)	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Lie/omit/mislead	22	18.0%	190	34.4%
Crime	22	18.0%	143	25.9%
Work/employment	17	13.9%	130	23.5%
Traffic	20	16.4%	112	20.3%
Drugs	24	19.7%	105	19.0%
Withdrawal	22	18.0%	65	11.8%
No contact/no show	18	14.8%	54	9.8%
Finances	16	13.1%	50	9.0%
Alcohol	4	3.3%	52	9.4%
Character	7	5.7%	41	7.4%
Other	10	8.2%	32	5.8%
Contact with LEO	3	2.5%	23	4.2%
Academic	2	1.6%	21	3.8%
Unknown	5	4.1%	16	2.9%
Failed PT	8	6.6%	11	2.0%
Basic qualifications	2	1.6%	13	2.4%
Mental/behavioral health	4	3.3%	10	1.8%
Domestic	2	1.6%	10	1.8%
Civil	1	0.8%	9	1.6%
Body art	2	1.6%	7	1.3%
Medical	1	0.8%	6	1.1%
Gang	2	1.6%	4	0.7%
Failed psych test	0	0.0%	6	1.1%
Prejudice	0	0.0%	3	0.5%

Table 3

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Recommendations

Below PERF provides recommendations on the major findings regarding disqualifications in these categories based on our analysis. Note that due to the data challenges described above, there are several limitations of this analysis. Going forward, it is important that PWCPD collect accurate and consistent data on the reasons applicants are disqualified at each phase of the hiring process, and continue to analyze this data on a regular basis.

Lying, omitting, or providing misleading information

Almost a third (31%) of applications that were disqualified had at least one reason listed that fell into the category of lying, omitting, or providing false or misleading information. While it is important to screen out applicants who are intentionally concealing information that would disqualify them from the process, it is also to be expected that applicants will want to present themselves in the best possible light. If the omitted information is relatively minor, PWCPD should consider whether this alone should be grounds for disqualification. In its review of reasons applicants were disqualified, PERF saw a few examples of “integrity issues” that appeared questionable. Some examples included:

- “Disclosed during poly interview that she had smoked marijuana one time, not listed on PHS.”
- “Integrity – applicant lied about having his part 2 paperwork completed ahead of time.”
- “Applicant provided an updated drug usage sheet that indicated he had used marijuana one time in 2015. He indicated he misunderstood the question on the application and PHS the first time he filled it out.”

PERF also found that black applicants were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to have reasons in this category listed for why they were disqualified (42.5% of black applicants had reasons in this category listed, as compared to 31.8% of white applicants and 25.8% of Hispanic applicants). Since this criterion can be somewhat subjective, PWCPD should review the specific types of integrity issues that should be grounds for disqualification, and should create an objective and consistent list of criteria. This will help prevent bias on the part of reviewers evaluating applicants at various phases of the process.

Recommendation: Tighten rules and guidance for disqualifying candidates for omitting or providing misleading information. *As recommended on page 26, PWCPD should consider the specific reasons candidates are disqualified for omitting or providing misleading information to determine whether these reasons are serious enough to warrant disqualification. Applicants may genuinely misremember information provided in earlier phases of the process, so providing inconsistent information does not necessarily indicate that the applicant is being dishonest. In general, if the information omitted is not in itself a disqualifying factor, it should not be grounds for disqualification.*

Recommendation: Look for racial/ethnic disparities in the data. *In collecting data on the reasons applicants are disqualified for lying, omitting, or providing misleading information, PWCPD should pay special attention to the types of reasons why individuals in various racial/ethnic groups are disqualified. For example, if disparities are found between racial/ethnic groups in the types of “integrity” issues identified, it could potentially be an indication of bias. PWCPD should also collect*

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data on the specific phases of the process where applicants are disqualified for these reasons, to further isolate sources of the disparity.

Criminal Behavior

PERF found that 24% of disqualified applications had at least one reason that fell into the category of criminal behavior. While it is important to screen out applicants who have been convicted of certain crimes, as stated in PWCPD's eligibility requirements, we noticed that some applicants appeared to have been disqualified solely for being a suspect in a crime. In addition, it appeared that some of the crimes listed as disqualifying factors were relatively minor (for example, "possession of a fake ID"). It is important to note that PERF did not see instances in which applicants were disqualified solely for minor criminal issues – these were generally one of several reasons for disqualification. However, PWCPD should review the types of crimes applicants have been disqualified for and consider whether relatively minor crimes should be grounds for disqualification.

Recommendation: Consider whether being a suspect in a crime warrants disqualification.

PWCPD should consider whether being a suspect in a crime is sufficient to warrant disqualification, because applicants who are not convicted or even arrested may not meet the criteria stated in the eligibility requirements.

Recommendation: Tighten rules and guidance for very minor criminal histories. *PWCPD should consider the severity of various crimes in its decisions to disqualify a candidate. If an applicant's only criminal history is something minor such as "possession of a fake ID," for example, PWCPD should consider whether that is appropriate grounds for disqualification. Although it would be problematic if individuals have displayed a pattern of these behaviors, some behaviors that individuals engage in when they are young may not be reflective of their overall character. PWCPD should ensure eligibility requirements for criminal activity are clearly defined, so that decisions are consistent and not subject to variation due to personal preferences of PWCPD hiring personnel.*

Work/Employment Issues

21.8% of applications had work or employment issues listed as reasons for disqualification. While some employment-related issues may be relevant to an applicant's suitability, some reasons PERF observed appeared questionable. For example, PERF observed reasons including "quitting without providing two weeks' notice." Although PERF did not observe instances where this was the only reason for disqualification, PWCPD should consider whether a reason like this should be considered in decisions to disqualify an applicant. In addition, PERF did not observe any work/employment related factors listed as part of PWCPD's eligibility criteria. If these types of issues are to be grounds for disqualification, PWCPD should ensure that they are objectively laid out in the eligibility criteria.

PERF also observed that black applicants were more likely to have a work/employment issue listed as a reason for disqualification than other racial/ethnic groups (27.4% of black applicants had this listed as a reason for disqualification, as compared to 19.5% of white applicants and 20.3% of Hispanic applicants). In addition, 33.3% of applicants in other or unknown racial/ethnic groups had reasons in this category listed. This suggests that work/employment related factors may be a barrier to some racial/ethnic groups over others.

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Recommendation: Establish objective criteria for disqualification related to work/employment issues. *PWCPD should establish objective criteria for disqualification related to work/employment issues, and should ensure these are clearly laid out in the eligibility criteria. Any employment-related issues that are subject to interpretation should be reviewed by a diverse group of personnel bureau staff before a decision is made to disqualify an applicant. PWCPD should also review the specific reasons applicants have been disqualified for employment-related issues across various racial/ethnic groups. If disparities are observed in the reasons applicants are disqualified between various racial/ethnic groups, this may be an indication of potential bias. Ensuring that disqualification criteria are objective and consistent across reviewers and applicants will prevent against potential bias.*

Withdrawals and No Contact / No Show

Almost 13% of applications withdrew voluntarily from the process, and about 11% were either listed as “no contact” or “no show.” This category includes applicants who failed to show up for scheduled appointments such as the physical fitness test, as well as applicants who apparently failed to return phone calls or emails. According to PWCPD’s eligibility criteria, applicants can be disqualified for “failure to comply with departmental requests and appointments.” However, in some cases it appeared that applicants were disqualified in instances where there could have been more follow-up. For example, PERF observed the following reasons listed:

- “Was advised to reschedule PT – no contact.”
- “Did not respond to background investigator.”
- “Applicant was supposed to call and reschedule second attempt PT after getting a doctor’s note- no contact as of 11/27/19.”

Recommendation: Avoid disqualifying applicants for missed appointments. *If applicants do not show up for the physical fitness test or other scheduled appointments, PWCPD should follow up with the applicant to determine what happened and attempt to reschedule the appointment. If multiple attempts are made to contact the applicant with no response, PWCPD will have no choice but to disqualify the applicant. But applicants should not be automatically disqualified after one missed appointment or contact.*

In addition, PERF observed that a higher proportion of female applicants than male applicants both withdrew (18% vs. 11.8%) and were disqualified due to no contact/no show (14.8% vs. 9.8%). A higher percentage of Hispanic applicants also appeared to withdraw as compared to other racial/ethnic groups (16.4% of Hispanic applicants were listed as withdrawing as compared to 12.9% of white applicants, 9.7% of black applicants, and 11.6% of Asian applicants). Since it appears that certain groups are more likely to withdraw from the hiring process than others, PWCPD should pay special attention to keeping these groups engaged throughout the process.

Recommendation: When applicants withdraw, try to find out why. *When applicants withdraw from the hiring process, PWCPD should follow up with these individuals to identify the reasons why they are withdrawing. This will help to identify any potential barriers to applicants throughout the hiring process.*

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Finances

Almost 10% of applicants had a financial reason listed for why they were disqualified. PERF observed specific examples including “multiple accounts past due.” As recommended on page 28, PWCPD should consider the types of financial issues that are serious enough to result in disqualification, and should consider the reasons and implications of any unsatisfied debt before deciding to disqualify a candidate. PERF also observed that a higher percentage of black and Hispanic applicants had financial issues listed as reasons they were disqualified (15.9% of black applicants and 11.7% of Hispanic applicants had financial reasons listed, as compared to 8% of white applicants). This is consistent with previous findings that financial history is a barrier for minority applicants.^{31,32}

Recommendation: Reconsider disqualification for financial issues. *Going forward, financial issues should not be the sole reason for disqualifying an applicant, especially given that members of minority groups are more likely to be adversely affected by financial issues. PWCPD should review and consider the types of financial issues that are serious enough to result in disqualification. Any financial criteria should be objective and clearly defined. It is noteworthy that the Philadelphia City Council recently made it unlawful for law enforcement agencies to use applicants’ credit scores or other credit-related information in hiring decisions.*³³

Character

PERF used this category for reasons that did not clearly correspond to specific eligibility criteria and could reasonably be classified as character judgments. 7.1% of applications had a reason listed in this category. A number of reasons listed cited a lack of “maturity” or “command presence.” Because there was no further detail provided for these reasons, it was unclear what factors were used to draw these conclusions.

Recommendation: Require discussion before disqualifying an applicant for subjective character traits. *Any concerns about an applicant’s “maturity,” “command presence,” or other subjective character traits that are matters of interpretation should be discussed with the entire personnel bureau staff before the decision is made to disqualify an applicant. This could be done during the “Better Qualified Review” process described above. Further, PWCPD should provide clear documentation of the specific reasons and justification for disqualifying an applicant due to a lack of “maturity” or “command presence.”*

³¹ Addo, Houle, and Simon (2016). *Young, Black, and (Still) in the Red: Parental Wealth, Race, and Student Loan Debt*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12552-016-9162-0>

³² Elmelech and Lu (2004). *Race, ethnicity, and the gender poverty gap*
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0049089X03000449>

³³ <https://phila.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4638766&GUID=F05D6AD3-91FB-484E-AE44-86CFAFD950BB&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=200413>. See also “City councilwoman proposes legislation criminalizing racially motivated 911 calls.” WHY. Sept. 11, 2020. <https://why.org/articles/city-councilwoman-proposes-legislation-criminalizing-racially-motivated-911-calls/>

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In addition, a number of applications had reasons for disqualification including friends or family members engaging in drug use, or “exposure” to drug use. Some examples include:

- “[Applicant was] last around drugs one week ago when roommates’ friend smoked marijuana outside applicant’s house.”
- “Last in the presence of marijuana 12/2018.”
- “Last exposed to marijuana 8/2019.”

As discussed on page 53, applicants’ friends or family engaging in drug use should not necessarily reflect poorly on the applicant. There may be situations in which an applicant’s family member may impact their ability to enforce the law (for example, if an applicant’s spouse is regularly engaging in criminal activity). However, for minor offenses such as marijuana use, applicants should not be disqualified for the behavior of friends and family members.

Recommendation: Do not disqualify candidates for actions of friends or family members or minor offenses. *Minor offenses such as marijuana use, friends and/or family members’ behavior, and “exposure to” marijuana should not be grounds for disqualification of a candidate. Candidates may not be able to control their exposure to drug use, especially by friends and family, and this should therefore not reflect poorly on the applicant.*

Contact with Law Enforcement

A number of reasons listed for why applicants were disqualified included “negative contact with law enforcement.” However, there was rarely any further detail of what the negative contact consisted of. As recommended on page 45, only involvement as a suspect or person of interest should be considered in hiring decisions. Other contact with law enforcement should not be relevant.

Recommendation: Do not consider broad “law enforcement contact” in hiring decisions. *PWCPD should not consider any contact with law enforcement in hiring decisions other than being a suspect or person of interest in a crime. Any other contact with law enforcement is not relevant and should not be grounds for disqualification. In addition, any law enforcement contact that results in disqualification of an applicant should be clearly documented as PWCPD is collecting data on applicants’ reasons for disqualification.*

“Other”

PERF used this category to classify a range of reasons that could not otherwise be categorized. Some were paperwork issues (i.e., “did not return missing forms” or “application not filled out completely”), while some stated “see file” or “see poly,” and could therefore not be categorized. Many did not fall into a clear category. However, PERF observed some reasons listed that appeared to be questionable grounds for disqualification. For example:

- Rescheduled PT two times at the last minute.
- Applicant struggled with understanding throughout the process and used the responses “I forgot” and “it was an honest mistake” regularly to excuse his inability to understand.
- Forms not notarized.

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Recommendation: Clearly specify reasons for disqualifications. *PWCPD should make sure to clearly document reasons applicants are disqualified, as opposed to making notes such as “see file.” This will allow for comprehensive data collection and analysis on reasons for disqualification. Adopting tracking software as recommended above will assist with improved documentation (see pages 57-58 for further details).*

Recommendation: Missing information/documentation and rescheduling of appointments should not result in automatic disqualification of an applicant. *PWCPD should try to encourage applicants to move forward with the hiring process by following up with applicants about missing information and appointments.*

As has been recommended previously, it is important that PWCPD collect comprehensive data on the reasons applicants are disqualified at various phases of the process by race/ethnicity and gender. Although some of this information is being collected currently, there are many areas for improvement for PWCPD in terms of data collection and analysis. Adopting applicant tracking software will greatly assist with this process. PWCPD should establish objective criteria and reasons for disqualification that can be documented in the new system. In this way, reasons for disqualification can be classified and tracked for more comprehensive analysis.

Section III. Review of Recruitment Efforts

Section III. Review of Recruitment Efforts

PWCPD employs a number of recruiting strategies, including sending recruiters to career fairs, military events, and local colleges and universities to provide information to prospective applicants. PWCPD also holds open houses at the department headquarters where individuals can bring their family members so they can ask questions about the hiring process.

Facing COVID-19 challenges in 2020, PWCPD has also used virtual meetings to provide information to applicants. According to interviews with PWCPD personnel, application numbers have not declined significantly during the pandemic. Below we describe some additional recruiting efforts and potential ways that PWCPD can strengthen its exiting recruitment strategies.

Recommendation: Review data about how applicants learned about the job opportunity, to inform future recruiting efforts. *As discussed on page 36, PWCPD asks a question on the initial application form about how applicants learned about the job opportunity. This information is valuable and should be reviewed periodically to inform future recruiting efforts. Going forward, this information could be collected in applicant tracking software (discussed on pages 57-58), which would allow for easier collection and analysis of this data.*

Social Media

Social media is a critical component of any police department recruiting effort. It provides an interactive, cost-effective way of engaging with a diverse group of potential applicants, and allows the department to show applicants what the department values.

PWCPD currently has accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, which are maintained by the Social Media Liaison in the Public Information Office. These are the department's general social media accounts and are not specific to recruiting. According to PWCPD's Social Media Liaison, the department posts about recruiting on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on a weekly basis.

PWCPD's social media accounts contain a variety of content including crime reports, PSAs, and pictures of PWCPD personnel engaging with community members. In addition, they include recruiting content such as information on recruiting events, and occasionally videos. PWCPD monitors user engagement on these accounts, including the number of people a post reached, the number of times people clicked on a post, and the number of times people clicked on a link within a post. PWCPD can also view aggregate demographic data (e.g., gender, age, city) of the followers of their social media accounts.

However, since these social media accounts are not specific to recruiting, PWCPD can only access data on the followers of the department's general accounts, as opposed to those who may be interested in pursuing a career at PWCPD.

Recommendation: Create social media accounts specifically for recruiting. *PWCPD should create social media accounts specifically for recruiting, distinct from the agency's main social media accounts. Doing so will help the department focus its messaging and engage with its target audience for recruiting, as opposed to the general public. For example, the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department maintains specific social media platforms³⁴ for the*

³⁴ "MPD Invites You to Join our Virtual Hiring Process." <https://joinmpd.dc.gov/>

Section III. Review of Recruitment Efforts

recruiting and application process, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube accounts. These platforms are separate from the agency's traditional social media sites.

Recommendation: Consider targeted ads on social media. *Given that a large proportion of PWCPD's target recruiting audience (i.e., 18-29 year-olds) use Instagram³⁵, PWCPD should consider using targeted ads on Instagram in its recruiting efforts. Many businesses and employers around the country use targeted ads to attract applicants. Targeted ads appear on the social media feeds of users who meet certain criteria selected by the advertiser. The criteria vary by platform, but can include age, geography, gender, job title, education, and interests. Ads and costs are fluid and customizable. PWCPD's Personnel Bureau should work with the Public Information Office to explore this possibility.*

Recommendation: Create short videos featuring officer's experience. *PWCPD should consider having officers create short videos about what they like about being a PWCPD officer. These videos can be featured on social media or on the agency's YouTube page.*

In reviewing the content on PWCPD's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, PERF noticed that the recruiting information does not readily stand out from much of the informational content. Similarly, the recruiting content often contains small text that does not convey a brand or overarching message. According to a 2018 survey of 2,500 employees by Indeed.com, the image or "brand" of an organization is important to job seekers in their decisions to apply to a particular company.³⁶

Recommendation: Consider working with a marketing firm or local business college. *PWCPD should identify local or regional marketing firms that can assist in the development of recruiting campaigns.³⁷ Alternatively, PWCPD can seek out advice from organizations that have experience marketing to young adults. These include the military, local universities, and businesses. By creating an internship or student project with a local university, PWCPD can likely obtain marketing advice for little or no cost. For example, the Northern Virginia Community College Mathematics, Sciences, Technologies and Business Division³⁸, with campuses in Prince William County, has a program of study in marketing. The PWCPD could seek opportunities to partner with the college, seeking student and instructor input to continually improve the agency's promotion strategies.*

YouTube Page

PWCPD also posts recruiting videos on the agency's YouTube page. Some of these are recruiting advertisements, while others are instructional videos about the hiring process. PERF reviewed several of the recruitment videos posted on PWCPD's YouTube page. The videos appeared to emphasize the excitement and challenges of a career with the department and portrayed officers in a variety of specialized units. Some of the videos were also released in Spanish, which is a good practice to ensure

³⁵ Whitney (2020). *The Complete Guide to Advertising on Instagram*.

<https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/11/20/instagram-advertising>

³⁶ *What Candidates Value According to 2018 Indeed Survey*. <https://jobsrockhill.com/blog/what-candidates-value-according-to-2018-indeed-survey/>

³⁷ Copple (2017). *Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century: Forum Proceedings*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0830-pub.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.nvcc.edu/academics/divisions/mstb/index.html>

Section III. Review of Recruitment Efforts

they are accessible to a wider range of audiences. Additionally, the videos featured both male and female officers from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds, and emphasized the community-oriented and service aspects of policing. This is a good practice, as it ensures that recruiting messages provide an accurate reflection of what police work involves.³⁹

In addition to the recruitment videos, PWCPD has created several instructional videos about different aspects of the hiring and selection process. The instructional videos are between two and five minutes long, and feature recruiting officers explaining information about aspects of the process. For example, one features officers demonstrating common mistakes applicants make during the PT test (e.g., poor technique). Though these videos are informative, the delivery is somewhat stilted and impersonal. Additionally, the videos are not currently embedded on PWCPD's recruitment website, and are only accessible from the Department's main YouTube page.

Recommendation: Modify content as appropriate for different platforms. *PWCPD should ensure that recruiting content is posted and easily accessible on a variety of platforms. However, PWCPD should keep in mind that content may need to be modified for use on different platforms. For example, the instructional videos are appropriate for YouTube and the recruiting website. However, they would not be as suitable for Facebook, where short, visually interesting, captioned videos are most effective.*⁴⁰

Recruiting Website

PWCPD does maintain a website specifically for recruiting at <https://www.joinpwcpd.org/>. The website contains information about the department, the hiring process, specialized units in the department, and pay and benefits. The landing page features a prominent "apply now" button, which takes the user to an external website on which the user can complete their initial application for sworn and non-sworn positions. The site features numerous images of officers at work and in posed shots. Many of the images show officers at community events.

Recommendation: Ensure website is easy to follow. *PWCPD should ensure that the text content on their recruiting website is succinct and visually appealing. Potential applicants should be able to quickly understand the process holistically and its stages. For example, the Baltimore Police Department's recruiting website uses bold colors, images, videos, and interactivity to convey information in sections that the user can navigate via scrolling or with a pop-in table of contents. The "apply now" button is prominently displayed in the top-right corner, and is always visible regardless of how far the user has scrolled on the page.*⁴¹

Engaging Youth

Prince William County has several programs that help the Police Department "grow their own" talent, meaning that the programs provide a pipeline for the Department to instill interest, skills, and values within young community members.

³⁹ Police Executive Research Forum (2019). *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It* <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>

⁴⁰ Patel (2016). *85 Percent of Facebook Video Is Watched Without Sound* <https://digiday.com/media/silent-world-facebook-video/>

⁴¹ <http://bpdrecruit.org/>

Section III. Review of Recruitment Efforts

As part of its Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, Prince William County Public Schools offers two courses in criminal justice education at six of the county's 12 high schools.⁴² The courses cover a variety of theoretical and practical issues in the criminal justice system, including policing. According to PWCPD personnel, these programs have been successful in generating interest among high school students in PWCPD's cadet program.

PWCPD maintains a police explorer post. The explorer post is for high school-aged students interested in law enforcement. PWCPD also has a cadet program for individuals between 18 and 20 years old who are more seriously considering a career with the PWCPD. Cadets are a paid position and thus have stricter entry requirements than the explorer post. Upon turning 21, cadets are eligible to enter the academy and, upon graduation, become certified police officers.

Explorer and cadet programs create and grow interest in law enforcement careers and promote good citizenship. They also serve to familiarize young people with police procedure and agency operations. And they encourage physical fitness routines, which is helpful, because physical fitness is often a barrier to otherwise qualified applicants⁴³. PWCPD should therefore continue funding and growing these programs.^{44,45}

Recommendation: Offer incentives for recruiting applicants. *PWCPD should consider offering cash incentives to officers for recruiting successful applicants. This strategy has been used successfully by Tucson, AZ Police Department. Officers receive \$1,000 if the applicant makes it through the hiring process to the academy, another \$1,000 when the applicant graduates from the academy, and another \$1,000 when they pass probation. This encourages a mentorship approach where officers are encouraged to mentor recruits throughout the training and onboarding process.*

Promising Recruiting Practices from Other Agencies

In December 2018, PERF held a conference on the police workforce crisis nationwide. Participants from agencies across the country convened to discuss strategies for recruitment and retention. Below are several promising practices in recruiting efforts from agencies that attended the conference:

- The Arlington County, VA Police Department asks its officers to contact the colleges or universities they attended, particularly their career services programs. The goal is for the Police Department to have a continuing presence at the school and to build relationships with faculty

⁴²Prince William County Public Schools 2020-21 High School Course Catalog https://www.pwcs.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_340140/File/Migration/DEPARTMENTS/Student%20Learning%20&%20Accountability/Student%20Learning/Course%20Catalog/HSCourseCatalog.pdf

⁴³ Johnson (2015). *Police Cadet Programs and 21st Century Policing*. https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/Working_with_youth_September2015.pdf

⁴⁴ Police Executive Research Forum (2019). *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It* (Pages 38-39) <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf> (p. 38-39)

⁴⁵ U.S. Dept. of Justice and Police Executive Research Forum (2017). *Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success* (Pages 41-51). <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0831-pub.pdf> (p. 41-45)

Section III. Review of Recruitment Efforts

and students. The program is staffed by using overtime and rotating the officers involved. APD has seen larger recruit classes since implementing this program.⁴⁶

- Prior to the onset of COVID-19, the Anne Arundel County, MD Police Department sought out community events and ran recruitment booths at these events. They reported an increase in the diversity of the departments' applicants since beginning these efforts.⁴⁷
- The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) in Washington, DC implemented a "live chat" feature on the department's website. This allows prospective applicants to interact with and ask questions to a member of the recruiting division in real time. According to MPD, staff can usually answer the applicant's question in five minutes or less and direct them to the next step in the process. This has been a beneficial engagement tool for the department and allows the recruiting staff to be more responsive than they can with traditional email or phone responses.⁴⁸

Recruiting Female Officers

Currently, PWCPD has approximately 14% female officers in its workforce. In addition to striving to improve racial and ethnic diversity within the department, PWCPD should also work to attract more female applicants. In 2017, the DOJ's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) released a report entitled *Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century*. The publication outlines a number of "action steps" for recruiting female candidates, including the following:

Law enforcement agencies should organize working groups composed of former and current female law enforcement officers to help develop recruitment strategies targeted at women. The working group should:

- a. Examine barriers such as policy, bias and organizational culture.*
- b. Examine training, workplace environment, flexible work schedules, and culture.*
- c. Guide leadership in overcoming barriers to gender inclusion⁴⁹*

Recommendation: Develop strategies for advancing women in policing. This should include changes in physical fitness standards to align the requirements more closely to tasks that officers often perform in the field. Information about these changes should be made available on the department's website and other channels.

PWCPD also should consider organizing a working group composed of former and current female law enforcement officers to help develop recruitment strategies targeted at women. For example, the National Institute for Women in Trades, Technology, and Science (IWITTS) has suggested efforts such as holding women-in-policing career fairs, and developing media

⁴⁶ Police Executive Research Forum (2019). *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It* <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ U.S. Dept. of Justice and Police Executive Research Forum (2017). *Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success* <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0831-pub.pdf>

⁴⁹ Copple (2017). *Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century: Forum Proceedings* (Page 14). Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0830-pub.pdf>

Section III. Review of Recruitment Efforts

platforms that promote and feature female officers. The Tucson, AZ and Albuquerque Police Departments have increased their number of female recruits using these strategies.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ National Institute for Women in Trades, Technology, & Science (n.d.) *Recruiting Women Officers - Fact Sheet*
<https://www.iwitts.org/recruiting-women-officers-fact-sheet>

Section IV. Personnel Bureau Staffing and Budget

Section IV. Personnel Bureau Staffing and Budget

Staffing

PWCPD's Personnel Bureau is comprised of the following staff members:

- Commander, who oversees the bureau and its functions
- Deputy Commander, who is responsible for daily operations of the bureau and administering policy and procedures
- Recruitment and Selection Supervisor, who oversees the background investigators and their areas of responsibility, as well as the bureau sergeant
- Recruiting Supervisor, who oversees the recruiters and polygraph examiners, and is responsible for coordinating recruiting events
- Police Personnel Bureau Manager, who oversees the responsibilities of the HR Analysts, Administrative Specialist, and administrative staff
- 7 background investigators (both sworn and civilian)
- 4 recruiters
- 4 polygraph examiners (one of whom is also a background investigator)
- 2 human resources analysts, who are responsible for tracking civilian applications
- Administrative Specialist, who tracks sworn applicants through NEOGOV and is responsible for the police officer applicant hiring process, including scheduling polygraph and physical fitness testing, and responding to applicant inquiries
- 2 Administrative Support Assistants, who are responsible for administrative paperwork processing, among other tasks.

It appears that the Personnel Bureau is adequately staffed, and staff members are diverse with regard to race/ethnicity and gender, which is important to ensure a range of perspectives. Personnel Bureau leaders should ensure that individuals in the unit have fresh ideas and perspectives on recruitment. Although many law enforcement agencies are reluctant to implement mandatory rotation policies in specialized units, PWCPD must ensure that personnel assigned to the Personnel Bureau understand today's applicants, as well as the importance of applicants contributing new ideas to the agency's culture, and not just "fitting in" with the current culture. Staff should be patient and empathetic, effective at relationship-building, and should promote a regular exchange of ideas. Importantly, any new staff in the unit should receive adequate training to ensure consistency in the application of Personnel Bureau policy and procedures.

Budget

The PWCPD Fiscal Year 2021 budget allocation⁵¹ was slightly more than \$113 million, a decrease of less than 1% compared to the prior fiscal year. For budget purposes, the agency is divided into five components: the Office of the Chief of Police, the Financial and Technical Services Division, the Support

⁵¹ FY2021 Budget: Prince William County, Virginia.

https://www.pwcgov.org/government/dept/budget/Documents/FY2021_Budget.pdf

Section IV. Personnel Bureau Staffing and Budget

Services Division, the Operations Division, and Criminal Investigations. As in most law enforcement agencies, over 82% of the department's total budget allocation funds employee salaries and benefits.

The Personnel Bureau, which handles all aspects of the hiring and recruiting process, is part of the Support Services Division. For budget purposes, the Support Services Division receives the second largest portion of department funds, approximately \$20.9 million. According to agency personnel interviewed, funds allocated to each of these components can be moved and adjusted based on changing needs.

The Personnel Bureau provided the PERF team spreadsheets that identify how funds were spent during the last several fiscal years. The spreadsheets were divided into several categories, including advertising, health services (i.e., cost of applicant psychological exams), marketing supplies, professional services (i.e., credit checks), and other functions. The spreadsheets are maintained by Personnel Bureau leaders. The spreadsheets contained detailed information on the date, type of expenditure, who requested the expenditure, and the cost. This is an effective practice for understanding how Personnel Bureau funds are utilized.

PERF's review of the department's funding allocation, along with interviews of Personnel Bureau leaders and staff, indicate that the agency provides sufficient funding to meet current and future hiring and recruiting needs. As discussed in section II, funding should be provided to allow for the purchase and maintenance of software to better track and process agency applicants. This is critical for improving and streamlining the applicant process, understanding whether applicants are being negatively impacted by any component of the process, and identifying which efforts are effective and which are not.

Section V. Implementation and Moving Forward

Section V. Implementation and Moving Forward

In commissioning PERF's review of the Prince William County Police Department (PWCPD), department leaders demonstrated a desire to improve the agency's policies and practices related to hiring and recruiting, and to improve diversity in hiring and recruiting to ensure that the PWCPD workforce is reflective of the community it serves.

PWCPD is to be commended for taking a hard look at its hiring and recruiting efforts in order to make the process more transparent, to attract and hire the best candidates, and to have a diverse work force.

In this process, PERF identified areas where members of minority groups and women seem to be impacted, and recommended changes in policy and practice to achieve the department's goals.

One important strategy going forward is to extend the BQ review process, in which a diverse group of personnel bureau staff review decisions to disqualify applicants, to all phases of the hiring process. In this way the process becomes more transparent internally.

And in order to better determine whether there is bias at any stage of the process, it is important to follow up with each candidate who withdraws, to determine whether there are patterns that could shine a light on changes that need to be made in process.

The following process map displays some of PERF's key findings and potential solutions identified at each phase of the hiring process.

Section V. Implementation and Moving Forward

Step 1: Initial Application on NeoGov

- **PERF's Key Finding:** The initial application on NeoGov should request only basic information to initiate the application process and encourage the reader to apply.
- **Fix:** PWCPD should remove any questions from the initial application that require further information and follow-up.

Step 2: Personal History Statement (PHS)

- **Key Finding:** The PHS is a lengthy document used to identify an applicant's personal and work history. The PHS has included questions that could reduce applicants' interest in applying, or their expectation that they might be suitable candidates, such as their financial history and previous contact with police.
- PERF found in its review that Black and Hispanic applicants were less likely to return the PHS or were more likely to be disqualified in this step of the process. **This is an area of concern.**
- **Fix:** PWCPD should carefully determine why many applicants are not returning the PHS. PERF recommended the elimination of many questions about financial history and other topics. PERF also recommends more modern software to track the process and allow applicants to complete the form online. PWCPD recruiters should contact individuals who do not turn in their PHS to encourage its completion and assist or answer any outstanding questions.
- The PWCPD has taken steps to implement these changes.

Section V. Implementation and Moving Forward

Step 3: Physical Agility Test

- **Key Finding:** Neither the State of VA nor the PWCPD has a minimum standard that must be met or maintained for officers. PWCPD's test includes a bench press and push-ups to measure upper body strength. PERF's observation of the physical agility process indicated a negative impact on female applicants who were unable to achieve the minimum passing score in this type of exercise.
- **Fix:** PERF recommends changing this format to reflect the duties that police officers perform on the job, including wearing a duty vest while completing an obstacle course. In addition, applicants should be able to take the physical agility test as many times as needed to successfully complete it. Discussions with other local law enforcement agencies that utilize an obstacle course-type process identified no adverse effects to female applicants.
- These changes should be publicized on the department's website and other channels.

Step 4: Polygraph

- **Key Finding:** Approximately half of candidates who make it to the polygraph phase are disqualified, and PERF observed some racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in disqualification rates. Polygraph exams have a questionable history for accuracy and can intimidate an individual who is unaware of how the tool is used.
- **Fix:** PERF identified numerous questions asked during the pre-polygraph interview that are not relevant or necessary and should be eliminated. PWCPD has initiated action on this recommendation.
- The polygraph process should be subject to an ongoing review, in order to identify factors that result in applicants being rejected.
- A decision to reject a candidate should not be made by a single person, but rather by a diverse panel of PWCPD Personnel Bureau leaders.

Step 5: Background investigation

- **Key Finding:** The background investigation portion of the process should be the key step in ensuring an applicant's personal and work history are thoroughly discussed and vetted. It is during this phase that investigators can discuss potential applicant issues including prior drug or alcohol misuse and criminal involvement.
- **Fix:** Questions about an applicant's financial, driving, and criminal history should be removed from other phases of the hiring process, and this information should be obtained during the background investigation.
- Financial issues should not be the sole reason for disqualifying an applicant, except for rare exceptions, such as a candidate whose financial problems are due to a history of gambling.

Section V. Implementation and Moving Forward

Immediate Action Items

Although change will take time, many of the steps outlined in this report can be implemented efficiently with little cost. PWCPD can implement the following **immediate action items** to improve its hiring and recruiting practices:

- **Improve messaging, use social media effectively, and utilize recruiters to engage with applicants.** Recruiters should follow up with applicants and make themselves available to encourage and assist applicants throughout the application process.
- **Streamline the application process and eliminate redundancy.** PWCPD should ensure that aspects of the hiring process such as the initial application form and Personal History Statement are user-friendly and not overly burdensome to applicants. This includes allowing for the PHS to be submitted online, and eliminating repetitive questioning from various phases of the process. For example, information that can be found through a background investigation, such as financial and credit issues, can be eliminated from earlier stages of the process.
- **Adopt application management software to allow for better data collection.** PWCPD should implement software that allows for the review of application materials from the initial application through each stage of the hiring process. This will allow for comprehensive data collection, including race/ethnicity and gender information, to inform improvements to the hiring process.
- **Promote transparency, and counter misperceptions that could deter applicants.** Eligibility criteria should be clearly defined and posted on the agency website to promote transparency. In addition, PWCPD should reconsider elements of the hiring process that could intimidate or deter applicants, such as asking for exhaustive financial information or asking about any contacts with law enforcement.
- **Expand BQ Review process.** PWCPD's process of reviewing applicant materials in a group format is a promising practice, and ensures that multiple individuals can weigh in on hiring decisions. This process should be expanded to review disqualification decisions for any subjective reasons that are not a clear violation of eligibility criteria. This will help prevent potential bias and ensure that a diverse group is involved in the decision-making process.

The Prince William County Police Department is made up of talented and dedicated officers and professional civilian staff members who are committed to serving Prince William County and its residents. By commissioning this review, PWCPD has demonstrated its commitment to improving its hiring and recruiting practices to encourage diversity within the department. This report is intended to serve as a guide for implementing these efforts, and as of the time of this report, PWCPD has already taken steps to implement a number of these recommendations. PWCPD has a long history of willingness to adopt new ideas and best practices, and this will go a long way toward the goal of diversifying the workforce.

Appendix A: Questionnaire for applicants who did not submit the Personal History Statement

PWCPD is conducting a study to identify strategies to improve its hiring and recruitment efforts. The study is being conducted by the [Police Executive Research Forum \(PERF\)](#), an independent research organization that assists police agencies in improving their operations.

Our records indicate that you recently submitted an application to PWCPD, but did not complete the next step of the process by submitting a personal history form. We would like to hear from you as to why you decided not to move forward with this phase of the process, as we want to identify any potential barriers to applicants that could help us improve our hiring practices. If you could please complete a brief, four-question questionnaire,

we would greatly appreciate it. All responses are anonymous and will be provided directly to PERF, and you do not have to provide your contact information unless you want to. We greatly appreciate your feedback in helping us to improve our hiring and recruitment efforts!

1. Why did you decide not to submit the personal history form after submitting your application? (select all that apply)
 - I forgot to submit the form within the allotted timeframe
 - The form was too long/burdensome
 - I don't have the necessary documents requested
 - I didn't think I would meet PWCPD's hiring requirements
 - Please specify
 - I was hired by a different agency
 - I decided I was no longer interested in pursuing a career at PWCPD
 - If so, why were you no longer interested?
 - I decided to pursue a career outside of policing
 - Other reason
 - Please specify

2. PWCPD strives to ensure that its workforce is reflective of the community it serves. What steps do you think PWPCD could take to hire more qualified candidates from a diverse array of backgrounds?

3. [optional question]: Please indicate your gender:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary (please specify)

Appendix A: Questionnaire for applicants who did not submit the Personal History Statement

4. [optional question]: Please indicate your race/ethnicity (select all that apply):
 - White
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Black
 - Asian
 - American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - Middle Eastern
 - Other (specify)

5. If you would like to provide your contact information so that PERF can follow up with you about your experience with the PWCPD application process, please do so here:

Appendix B: Estimates of the proportion of Prince William County residents who are eligible to be a police officer

Appendix B: Estimates of the proportion of Prince William County residents who are eligible to be a police officer

Since the demographic makeup of Prince William County as a whole is not necessarily representative of the population of individuals who are eligible to be officers at PWCPD, PWCPD asked that PERF attempt to estimate the proportion of county residents who are eligible to be a police officer. PWCPD has various requirements that affect an individual's eligibility to become a police officer, including age, education, criminal history, and fitness requirements. In order to estimate the eligible workforce population of Prince William County, PERF considered a number of factors based on county and state-level data.

Methodology

Using census data, PERF first looked at the demographic breakdown of the Prince William County as a whole.⁵² We then considered the age of the population that is eligible to be a police officer. Based on the age categories available in census data, we used 15-44 as the eligible age range. Although this includes some individuals who would be too young to apply to PWCPD, we erred on the side of being more inclusive. We then considered the following additional variables at the state level as indicators of PWCPD's eligibility criteria: illicit drug use within the past year, percentage of the population who had graduated high school, obesity levels, incarceration rates, and felony conviction rates. Although these do not exactly match PWCPD's eligibility criteria, they are potential indicators that are available in public data. Since we did not have county-level data for these variables, we assumed that the state-level data was generally reflective of residents of Prince William County.

Using these rates and the demographic breakdown of Prince William County residents, we estimated the percentage of the population that is between the ages of 15-44, has not used illicit drugs within the past year, has graduated high school, is not obese, is not currently incarcerated, and does not have a felony conviction. Taking all these factors together, PERF came up with the following estimates for the eligible workforce of Prince William County:

- Total: 105,930 (approx. 23% of total Prince William County population)
 - White: 49,557
 - Black: 14,051
 - Hispanic: 27,891
 - Asian: 14,431

It is important to note that these are rough estimates based on the data available. The factors considered in this analysis are not reflective of all of PWCPD's eligibility requirements, so the estimates generated represent a "ceiling" of the actual eligible population. In addition, these estimates do not account for factors such as interest in becoming a police officer, which would have an important impact on PWCPD's applicant pool.

⁵² For purposes of this analysis, we specifically looked at White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian populations, as other groups had relatively low counts that would be difficult to account for in the estimates.

Appendix C: PWCPD Officers and Supervisors by Race and Gender

In addition to attempting to attract diverse officer applicants from a variety of backgrounds, it is important that law enforcement agencies have diversity throughout their ranks. PWCPD requested that PERF review the demographic breakdown of both officers and supervisors employed at PWCPD. PWCPD provided a roster – current as of January 2021 – of 665 sworn personnel, which included their title, gender, and race.

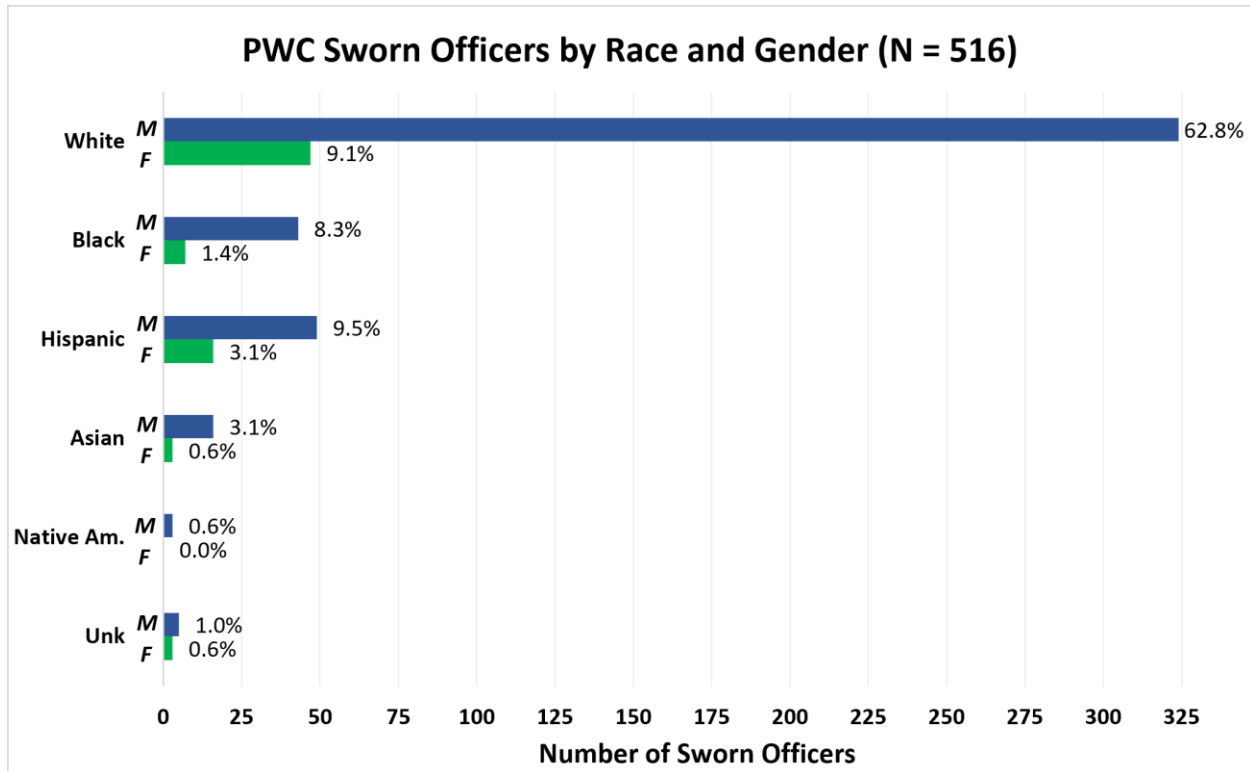
Officer Rank by Race and Gender

Figure 10 shows the demographic breakdown of the department's 516 sworn police officers and master police officers. A large majority are in one of four racial or ethnic groups: White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian.

When gender is added to the analysis, it is evident that four demographic groups account for the large majority (89.7%) of sworn officers:

- Approximately three fifths (62.8%) of officers are white males.
- The next largest demographic group is Hispanic males (9.5%).
- White females make up 9.1% of officers.
- Black males are 8.3% of all officers.

Appendix C: PWCPD Officers and Supervisors by Race and Gender



The remaining 10.3% of sworn officers consist of Hispanic females, Asian males, Black females, Asian males, males of an unknown race, Native American males, and females of an unknown race. There are no Native American female sworn officers.

Supervisors by Race and Gender

Figure 11 shows the demographic breakdown of the department's 149 sworn supervisors, which includes those with the title of sergeant up to and including the title of deputy chief. Four demographic groups account for nearly all (98.0%) police supervisors. Approximately three quarters (75.2%) of sworn supervisors are white males. The next largest demographic group is white females (11.4%), followed by Hispanic males (6.7%), and Black males (4.7%). The remaining 2.0% of sworn supervisors consist of Black females and Asian females. There are no Hispanic female, Asian male, Native American male, nor Native American female sworn supervisors.

Appendix C: PWCPD Officers and Supervisors by Race and Gender

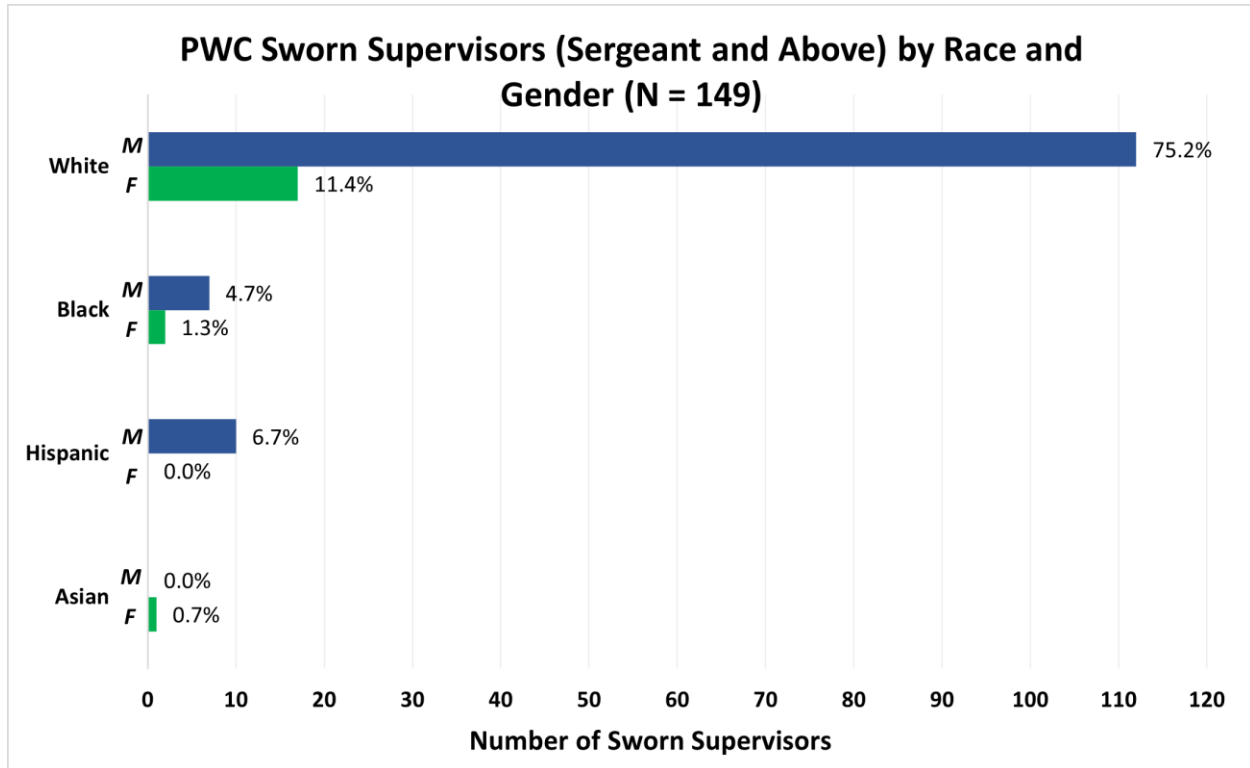


Figure 11

As compared to females at the rank of officer, a much smaller proportion of supervisors are female (13% of supervisors are female, as compared to 29% of officers).

In addition, there is less racial/ethnic diversity among supervisors as compared to officers. 371 (72%) officers are white, compared to 145 (28%) officers in other racial/ethnic groups. In contrast, 128 (86%) supervisors are white, compared to 20 (13%) supervisors in other racial/ethnic groups.

Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities

As noted earlier in this report, Prince William County's population has a racial and ethnic composition as follows:⁵³

- 42.9% White alone
- 23.5% Hispanic or Latino (of any race)⁵⁴
- 20.3% Black or African American alone
- 8.3% Asian alone
- 4.3% Two or More Races.

The demographics of the Police Department suggest that the department needs to make a concerted effort to reduce racial and ethnic disparities between the police and the community they serve. Fewer

⁵³ Prince William County, VA. "Geospatial Technology Services: Fast Facts" Retrieved May 24, 2021 <https://www.pwcva.gov/departments/gis/fast-facts>

⁵⁴ Hispanics and Latinos include any race, whereas the other racial categories do not include Hispanics or Latinos

Appendix C: PWCPD Officers and Supervisors by Race and Gender

than 10% of PWCPD officers are Black, fewer than 13% are Hispanic, and fewer than 4% are Asian-Americans.

Recommendation: The PWCPD must take aggressive efforts to encourage, coach and mentor minority and female police officers for future leadership positions. *Efforts to improve race and gender diversity in leadership roles begin at the recruiting and hiring level. Steps identified in this report will assist PWCPD with improving its ability to reflect the diversity of the community it serves.*

This should include changes in physical fitness standards to align the requirements more closely to tasks that officers often perform in the field. Information about these changes should be made available on the department's website and other channels.

Next, the department must implement formal and informal steps to encourage, coach and mentor minority and female police officers for future leadership positions.

This can include connecting minority and female police officers with current supervisors who are willing to share their experiences, provide insight to opportunities, and challenge the officers to seek out a variety of assignments, thereby broadening their skills and abilities. Mentors must be supported by senior PWCPD leaders career, given training on how to assist junior officers, and provided the time to support this initiative. The program should be designed to promote professional growth, inspire junior officers, and create a culture of inclusivity.