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Technology Strategies for Officer Retention in State & Local Law Enforcement

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Police departments across the nation are facing a shared problem: **officer retention.**

Police officer retention requires multi-pronged approaches, including a plan for harnessing a department's existing technologies:

Even well-trained, qualified, and experienced police officers are leaving their departments. According to one report, nearly **90 percent of police departments are understaffed** and grappling with sudden shifts in workforce mindset, which strains resources and leads to higher burnout among the officers and support staff that remain.

Consequently, understaffed departments take longer to respond to emergency calls, and some crimes may not get the deserved attention. As communities face rising violent crime rates, homelessness, organized retail theft and opioid overdoses, among other challenges, senior leaders in police departments face increasing pressure to do more with less.

IEM partners with state, local, tribal, territorial, and federal agencies as a leader in the deployment of **innovative digital solutions to address today's most pressing challenges for first responders.** Based on insights from the law enforcement community, this white paper presents recommendations for police departments in any jurisdiction facing workforce retention issues. Along with these recommendations we offer ways to approach the problem with a combination of process automation improvements and other technologies to create better working environments and maximize available resources.

90%
of police departments may be understaffed

Today's Policing Workforce Challenges

On the heels of the global COVID-19 pandemic, employers in every sector and industry are struggling to keep workers. According to a recent assessment, today's workforce demands higher pay, greater flexibility, and recognition.[1] Equally important, data suggests that today's workers prioritize work-life balance, mental health, and workplace flexibility over traditional incentives like higher pay.

Within this context, police departments are forced to balance the challenges of police work amid rising crime and resource limitations all while monitoring their workforce for signs of fatigue,

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[1] Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/03/24/technology-is-key-to-employee-retention/?sh=1bf3f16d1682

burnout, mental health issues, and other stressors. If they do not, the costs of losing qualified personnel may limit investments in other critical aspects of the public safety mission.

In 2021 the number of retiring police officers rose by 45 percent, accompanied by an 18 percent increase in the resignation rate nationwide.[2] Even aggressive recruitment efforts cannot reduce the impact these departures place on departmental resources.

18%

increase in officer resignations nationwide

Whether police departments base their staffing on population, crime statistics, or a saturation threshold, one thing is certain – few agencies have enough officers to provide proactive policing. All too often, it becomes a cascading problem. **To fill the gap left by vacancies, agencies place more burden on their current workforce.** The vicious cycle continues as overworked staff suffer from low morale and burnout, potentially leading to more resignations.

According to Eric DiLorenzo, a recently retired Captain with the Myrtle Beach Police Department, "recruitment brings its own unique challenges, but the elephant in the room is officer retention. Although some departments still get droves of applications, keeping new officers is becoming nearly impossible."

Even steps like raising wages may not be enough to address the root causes behind officer departures. "Today, police officers care about one thing: work-life balance," says DiLorenzo. "When scheduled for time off, they want to be with their families and expect those boundaries to be honored." These expectations extend to other areas as well, including officer wellness, the right tools and resources to do the job, and safe forums for voicing concerns or requesting help.

Five Steps to Leveraging Technology as a Force Multiplier for Officer Retention

Workforce Insights	Identify Mission Critical Data	Process Automation	Ongoing Growth	Personal Connection

[2] Source: https://www.policeforum.org/workforcesurveyjune2021

Readily available technology offers police departments the tools to enhance quality of life for their workforce and improve retention; however, implementing the technology presents challenges. IEM's experience working with state, local and federal government agencies to deliver digital solutions, coupled with input from our team of senior law enforcement advisors, provides keen insights for agencies responding to, or getting ahead of, workforce retention issues and solving challenges as they arise.

1   **Gather up-to-date insights from the entire workforce – patrol officers, administrative support staff, and the management team.** Leaders need to make an up-front commitment of time and effort to create interactive forums for their workforce, providing opportunities to communicate concerns, and then listen to the feedback from the organization. The value of these engagements rapidly takes shape when options—or courses of action— emerge from the open dialogue and feedback.

Police academies are a great place to start. New recruits are accessible and can be easily queried using cost effective digital apps or in-person forums to gather insights on what they expect of their new employer, and what tools would increase their morale and keep them engaged in their new career.

With these insights, leaders can start to shape and deploy the next steps to address the input provided by their workforce in order of priority, while also creating opportunities to continuously gather more insight from across the organization. Options may range from a retention bonus program, rewards for "workforce ambassadors", focus groups, or a simple three-click data collection effort to monitor officer priorities, stress levels and other potential burnout factors.

2   **Determine the essential elements of information and collect mission-critical data to enable rapid, informed decision-making when warning signs appear.** This critical step should be taken in coordination with leaders across the organization, from human resources and finance to operational commanders and command staff. Ultimately, the right data and measurement lead to the proper trend analysis and can trigger interventions when the workforce nears critical thresholds.

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> **Eric DiLorenzo, IEM**
> Ret. Captain, Myrtle Beach Police Department

For example, if officers working a series of high intensity calls in a short timeframe need a break, managers and senior leaders could collectively monitor and act upon that information in real-time. Those triggers, and the technologies to apply them, are easily implemented but require deliberate effort up front to understand the working environment, conditions and causal factors. Additionally, leaders should monitor how the workforce responds to these interventions over time, and then re-calibrate courses of action as needed.

The ability to capture the data for this sort of monitoring is often within easy reach for most departments. Simple, low-cost data collection through mobile devices, or custom applications designed to pull in data from human resources or staffing databases are often enough to get started. In many instances, agencies may simply need to activate features in their existing platforms to access valuable information that can guide decision-making.

3 **Identify the tasks and functions that can be combined, streamlined, or digitally transformed through process automation.** Some experts say 30 percent of routine functions can be automated with existing technologies. But contrary to popular belief, artificial intelligence isn't necessary to automate many of the basic tasks carried out in today's police departments.

In fact, departments can strategically leverage customizable software platforms to convert dozens of time-consuming functions into automated workflows, freeing up hundreds of hours or more over a calendar year. This can often be done within existing software licenses, saving up-front cost to deploy new tools.

There are two important steps departments can take. First, map workflows and pain points. Identify tasks that take a significant amount of time to complete due to multiple steps, or that require multiple levels of review or sign-off. While not everything can be streamlined, the process of mapping these tasks and functions can reveal the low-hanging fruit.

30%

of routine functions may be automated with existing technologies, according to estimates

Second, evaluate software currently used by the department and work with IT professionals to determine the best platforms for customization and workflow automation. This includes an examination of tools for capturing data and performing basic analytics, and potential integrations with low cost, open source tools. Armed with this information, departments can then identify the pain point intersections: the tasks that can be simplified, and the platforms on which to do it.

Most police departments have a plethora of software in their portfolios; all of it serving the purpose of supporting mission-critical functions, from human resources recruitment to promotion and wellness management. However, without a clear strategy for integrating these tools, agencies could suffer from the dilemma of duplication, overlaps, and hidden gaps leading to missed opportunities. By focusing on simple paths for streamlining arduous functions, departments can improve working conditions and free up resources.

4 **Build a culture of continuous improvement within the department, from the top down.** Put simply, continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve efficiencies through optimizing technologies, services, or processes. Police departments should view their technology as a means of continuous improvement

rather than a one-time solution to solve a single issue. Consistent collection of feedback should be part of a department's strategy and planning, especially after new technologies are purchased and deployed. By querying the workforce at regular intervals, senior leaders can identify and alleviate stressors, demonstrating a responsiveness to workforce needs and a commitment to improving.

5 **Finally, leaders should remember to look outside their portals and dashboards to assess the health and welfare of their workforce.** Well-structured data, combined with the proper visualization tools, enables leaders to see the workforce in the aggregate and home in on specific patterns or behaviors that indicate when it's time to act. However, quantitative data alone will not tell the whole story.

Leaders should maintain lines of personal connection and interaction to help retain their administrative and support teams, and frontline patrol officers. It is simply too easy to get lost in the data and dashboards. No technology can replace the value of one-on-one conversations, team lunches, a ride-along or new hire orientation sessions.

Stated another way, the proper use of technology should not be perceived as a shortcut or replacement for human interaction. Instead, it's a critical component of a larger toolkit that when properly aligned and integrated, empowers senior leaders to adapt with their workforce.

Expanding the Retention Toolkit

As law enforcement leaders know, an engaged, empowered, well-trained and fully equipped staff is the easiest to retain. The good news is that today, more than ever, senior leaders have options to leverage technology to further this objective.

A strategy for simplifying work and connectedness could empower officers, analysts, and support staff enabling them to focus more on the critical work that can't be digitized or automated. With that comes a greater sense of fulfillment and accomplishment – two keys to higher retention.

"Our job at IEM is to help police departments get the tools they need to tell the story, both in terms of the threats faced by their communities, and their efforts to address them, often with very limited resources."

Jim Weldin, IEM Manager
Ret. Newark City Police Department

IEM is a pioneer in developing mission-specific software and digital tools. By strategically integrating our customized solutions into a more robust toolkit, the result is a whole greater than the sum of the parts. Our primary value lies in the fact we are a process-driven solutions provider. Rather than selling a software solution to solve one challenge, IEM integrates software, design processes, and workflows to maximize an agency's IT investments and existing infrastructure to yield measurable outcome-based results and improved performance.

IEM is platform agnostic, enabling us to design and build for the best fit and value, often within an agency's existing software. For example, some agencies are

unaware that their existing platforms offer quickly customizable and deployable applications in support of critical functions, from streamlining training and certification tracking to monitoring officer wellness. IEM builds and deploys these applications at the speed and scale of the mission.

Agencies may also be unaware that their data does not need to go through an arduous conversion process to be fully integrated into time and cost saving applications. Through our partnerships with different platform providers, IEM delivers applications that extract data in a variety of formats and maps them to critical functions, putting the data to work immediately.

IEM is process driven. Simple up-front steps, like software rationalization— assessing an organization's software portfolio to map and streamline operations—followed by strategically executed integrations could lead to greater efficiency and a seamless transition. Customization may be guided by the same process, ensuring that each modification stays true to strategic priorities and objectives while maximizing the return on an agency's IT investments.

Equally important is a holistic view of the agency's mission. IEM's philosophy is to approach dashboards and other data visualization tools—which agency leaders are most likely to interact with daily—as tools emerging from a well-defined decision-making process. This process identifies the mission essential function and assimilates the essential elements of information necessary to monitor the agency's progress and define potential courses of action. With that starting point, IEM's team develops tailored metrics that evolve and adapt as circumstances change, enabling and informing decision-making that supports and sustains a diverse workforce.

Supervisors in a law enforcement agency were juggling multiple spreadsheets and emails to track training and certification information for sworn officers. **IEM designed a custom solution** on the agency's existing software platform to automate workflows and simplify gathering, analyzing and displaying data in real-time. **The solution can alleviate hundreds of hours of manual labor**. IEM also created a complimentary mobile tool in the same platform to simplify data collection for mission-specific functions, saving officers' considerable time when writing reports and collecting information in the field.

IEM takes data privacy and security seriously. While collecting and using data is important for officer retention efforts, it is critically important that agencies take steps to maintain the data privacy and security for their workforce.

Police departments should have clear policies and procedures in place for handling sensitive data and work closely with their IT departments to ensure data is stored securely and access is limited to authorized personnel only. This can help build trust with the workforce and prevent potential data breaches that could harm both officers and the department. IEM's team of experts has experience working to prevent data breaches, ensuring that agencies take important

steps to minimize data loss when incidents occur, and incorporates security measures into every solution we build.

Ultimately, when the right data is harnessed and accessible to senior leaders in law enforcement agencies, communities win. This includes the development of metrics based on the adopted staffing model and key data supporting the agency's vision. Leaders need those metrics to be comprehensible and reflective of real-time information. IEM's experience in building and deploying digital solutions has proven that the strategic process, in conjunction with supportive technology, is the best way to move the needle and manage workforce retention strategies.

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About IEM

IEM's capabilities empower our partners to protect and serve communities in new and innovative ways. Our team has supported agencies in all 50 states and hundreds of localities, delivering consulting services that modernize IT systems, deliver valuable data, and optimize workforces. IEM also brings extensive experience from the Federal, state, and local law enforcement communities, with senior leaders and savvy operators who relate first-hand to the challenges faced by police agencies across the country.

IEM is the **world's largest woman- and minority-owned crisis management firm** bringing nearly four decades of innovation to solve the most pressing challenges for law enforcement agencies. Our mission is to build a safe, secure, and resilient world. IEM partners with government agencies, not-for-profits, and private sector organizations around the world to improve preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation to strengthen homeland security and defense, public health, cybersecurity, and critical infrastructure. We create science-based tools, technology and strategies that help our customers achieve measurable results—saving lives, reducing costs, increasing efficiencies, and facilitating evidence-based decision making.