Police Staffing Observatory
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

PSO Newsletter

November 2026

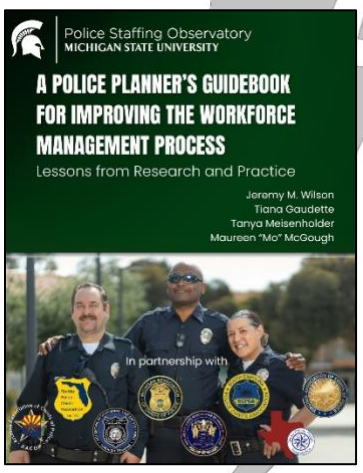
Our newsletter features

- PSO Reports
- Partner Publications
- PSO Ponderings
- Partners at the American Society of Criminology Conference
- New Partner
- Professional Activities

We regularly update our website and our LinkedIn page. Please follow us and invite interested contacts to do so as well. Those interested may sign up for the PSO Newsletter by contacting PSO.info@msu.edu

PSO Reports

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A Police Planner's Guidebook for Improving the Workforce Management Process: Lessons from Research and Practice

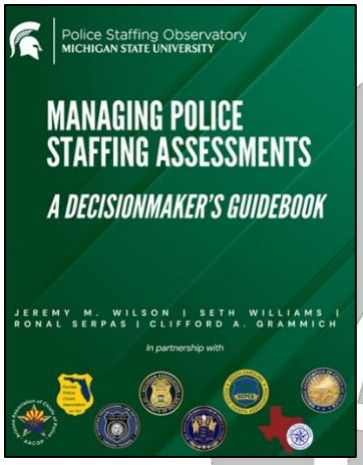
**Jeremy M. Wilson and *Tiana Gaudette, Michigan State University, *Tanya Meisenholder, New York University, and *Maureen 'Mo' McGough, University of South Carolina Excellence in Policing and Public Safety Program*

This guidebook provides insights into developing and maintaining police forces. Featuring input from both practitioners and policing scholars, its three sections discuss

- The current nature of the police staffing experience as characterized by state associations of law enforcement practitioners. This includes examples from specific departments as well as discussion of efforts to improve staffing processes.
- Briefs on key staffing issues, including recruitment, promotions, turnover, retention, workforce environment, and workforce planning.
- More extensive discussions on
    - Inexpensive staffing tactics for police staffing challenges
    - Strategies for speeding up the hiring process
    - Community policing solutions to police staffing challenges
    - Leadership as a morale engine in small and medium-size police agencies

- Improving police service provision through proper span of control and first-line supervision
- Building a modern public safety workforce by integrating professional (civilian) staff
- Understanding police staffing issues through online reviews.

A key lesson of this work is that the most effective response to the police staffing challenge involves addressing all its multiple dimensions. Creating meaningful and long-lasting impact to workforce levels will demand careful attention to recruitment, promotions, turnover and retention, workforce environment, and workforce planning. The guide also underscores the value that academic research and collaboration can bring to policing. Combining insights from research and practice, this guide provides evidence-based guidance to critical areas affecting police staffing.



Managing Police Staffing Assessments: A Decisionmaker's Guidebook

**Jeremy M. Wilson, Michigan State University, Seth Williams, PFM Consulting, Ronal Serpas, Loyola University-New Orleans, and *Clifford A. Grammich, Birdhill Research and Communications*

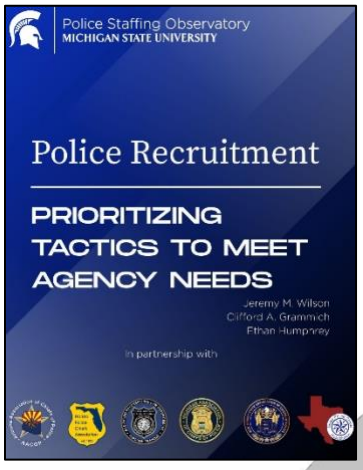
Police agencies seeking to maintain their staffing levels often focus first on recruitment and retention of officers. A more critical initial question, however, is how many officers do they need? This guidebook provides a framework for understanding, conducting, and managing staffing studies using evidence-based and workload-driven approaches.

Drawing on research and practical experience, this guidebook outlines key questions to consider in conducting staffing studies, including

- What is a staffing study?
- Why conduct a staffing study?
- What are the challenges associated with a staffing study?
- What are typical approaches to staffing allocation?
- What data are needed for a staffing study?
- Who should be part of the conversation about a staffing study?
- Who should conduct the study?
- How much does a staffing study cost?
- How long does a study take?
- How often should a study be conducted?
- What should agencies do after a staffing study?

Ultimately, staffing studies are not one-time exercises but part of an organizational learning process that supports resource optimization, policy development, and community trust. This guidebook can help

agencies use staffing as a strategic tool for achieving broader public safety objectives and to integrate research, stakeholder input, and continuous evaluation into workforce planning decisions.



Police Recruitment: Prioritizing Tactics to Meet Agency Needs

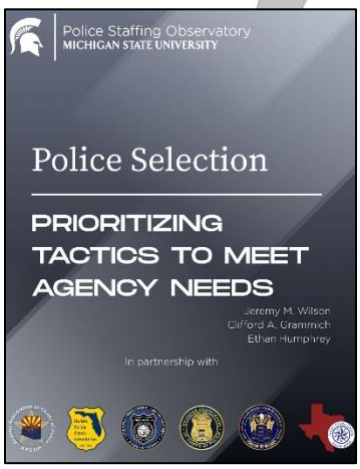
**Jeremy M. Wilson, Michigan State University, *Clifford A. Grammich, Birdhill Research and Communications, and *Ethan Humphrey, Michigan State University*

This work assesses 225 recruitment tactics that law enforcement agencies may use to attract candidates to their agencies. The authors review rankings of these tactics by 30 law enforcement practitioners on dimensions of staffing levels, workload management, timing of effects, ease of implementation, agency costs, quality of policing, and community policing outcomes.

The analysis shows that no single recruitment tactic is universally optimal. Rather, effectiveness will depend on agency-specific circumstances and priorities. Tactics such as mentoring applicants, providing individualized guidance, streamlining hiring processes, and conducting community outreach rank highly for increasing staffing levels and improving other performance dimensions. Financial incentives such as increasing pay can boost both recruitment and retention but entail significant costs. Modifying hiring requirements may be a relatively quick way to increase staffing levels but it can also raise concerns about quality of policing.

Because police agencies may need to address multiple goals in recruitment, the analysis examines how tactics perform in a variety of scenarios. Developing a recruitment website, for example, can be helpful for agencies seeking to improve staffing relatively quickly at relatively low cost. Targeting a broad range of college majors among recruits may help agencies who are seeking to improve the quality of their force and the quality of their community policing efforts particularly.

The analysis highlights three lessons for police departments. First, they should use the tactics that appear to be most tailored to their environment. Second, they need to understand what works under their particular circumstances. Third, they should consider tactics that can perform across the most relevant combination of dimensions they need to address.



Police Selection: Prioritizing Tactics to Meet Agency Needs

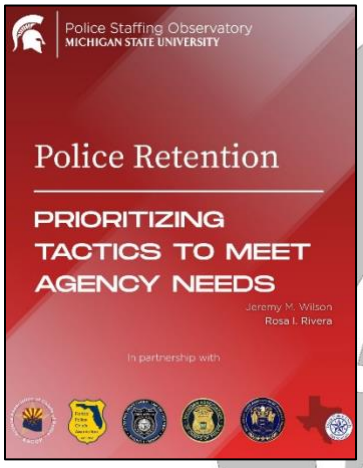
**Jeremy M. Wilson, Michigan State University, *Clifford A. Grammich, Birdhill Research and Communications, and *Ethan Humphrey, Michigan State University*

This work reviews 49 tactics that police agencies may use to select personnel. More specifically, it reports on assessments that 30 practitioners gave to these tactics on dimensions of staffing levels, workload management, speed of impact, ease of implementation, cost of implementation, quality of police work, and effects on community policing.

It finds the effectiveness of selection tactics will depend on agency-specific needs, constraints, and priorities. Agencies will need to consider tradeoffs in choosing particular

tactics. For example, the review finds that streamlining hiring processes can boost staffing levels but may pose implementation challenges. Hiring ahead of vacancies can improve workload management but may require at least a temporary redeployment of resources from elsewhere. Easing residency requirements may offer more candidates for selection but adversely affect community policing.

The authors advise agencies choosing among selection tactics to consider those most tailored to their circumstances, not just those that appear easy or that have been done historically or elsewhere. Police agencies should understand there is no single best tactic but there are alternatives for addressing their most pressing need. Finally, police agencies should consider relevant combinations of dimensions. For a faster and inexpensive solution, for example, it should consider tactic speed and costs. This work can guide agencies in identifying and balancing tradeoffs among the tactics most applicable to their situation.



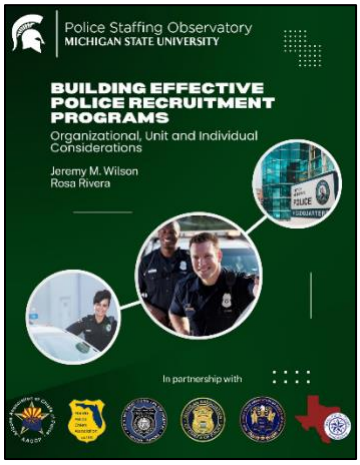
Police Retention: Prioritizing Tactics to Meet Agency Needs

**Jeremy M. Wilson and *Rosa I. Rivera, Michigan State University*

While recruitment tactics have received considerable attention from policing practitioners and scholars, retention tactics have not. This is unfortunate, because the cost to retain a police officer is much lower than that to recruit one. To overcome this gap, this research reviews 63 tactics, identified through a review of academic literature, practitioner reports, and media accounts, that police agencies may use to increase their retention of officers. More specifically, it presents rankings of these tactics by 30 law enforcement practitioners on dimensions of staffing levels, workload management, timing of effects, ease of implementation, agency costs, quality of policing, and community policing outcomes.

The authors find that tactics vary in their effectiveness and across dimensions. Practitioners note that financial tactics such as increased pay and enhanced benefits, for example, can boost staffing levels but entail significant costs. Reducing workload by reducing calls for service (e.g., by responding to calls through other means) can improve workload management but may be difficult to implement. Civilianizing positions can have some positive effects on maintaining staff levels and workload management while having relatively quick effects but also be difficult to implement.

Agencies will need to consider their own specific contexts in choosing tactics for retention. This guide can help agencies choose tactics that align with their specific goals, constraints, and needs. More broadly, it can help agencies move from ad hoc retention efforts to evidence-based workforce planning that integrates retention with broader personnel strategies.



Building Effective Police Recruitment Programs: Organizational, Unit, and Individual Considerations

**Jeremy M. Wilson and *Rosa Rivera, Michigan State University*

Law enforcement agencies continually seek to attract applicants but have little systematic guidance in conducting recruitment. The need for such guidance has become even more acute in recent years as they struggle with legitimacy issues and other sources of decreasing interest in the field.

This work draws on research from multiple fields and interviews with 26 subject-matter experts from a variety of agencies to outline the elements of a successful recruitment program. At the organizational level, the analysis highlights the importance of leadership, culture, budget, and recruitment goals. At the unit level, it highlights the importance of strategies to achieve goals, metrics for measuring progress toward them, and the ability to continually learn from experiences. At the individual level, it discusses recruiter attributes, recruiter training, recruiter incentives, and recruiter types.

The importance of these components may vary by agency circumstance. But recruiting must be a systemic effort. By building the broader infrastructure necessary for recruitment programs, police organizations can effectively address the dynamic staffing challenges they face.

Partner Publications

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Meeting Their Needs: Evaluating Agency-Specific Workplace Factors to Enhance Officer Retention Strategies

*Ashleigh N. Wojslawowicz, Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

This work develops a comprehensive evaluation of retention factors through a case study of a mid-size municipal police department. The findings reinforce the importance of including officers' voices in staffing evaluations, ensuring lived experiences align with agency objectives.

From Academia to Action: How Police Leaders Translate Evidence on the Ground

Scott M. Mourtgos and Ian T. Adams, University of South Carolina

This work examines an evidence-based crime reduction program the Salt Lake City Police Department implemented in 2022 in response to high crime rates. The article highlights that, even with staffing constraints, agencies operating at 20% below approved staffing levels can achieve meaningful crime reductions through targeted, evidence-based investment.

Financial Incentives for Police Recruitment and Retention: Perceived Effectiveness and Tradeoffs

*Jeremy M. Wilson, Michigan State University, and *Clifford A. Grammich, Birdhill Research and Communications

This work assesses 29 financial tactics identified through a systematic review of sources that police agencies may use to recruit and retain officers. Practitioner assessments of the tactics suggest that financial tactics provide the most direct, tangible benefits to employees (e.g. pay and retirement plans) and may be the most effective form of social exchange between agencies and officers.

A New Service Strategy: How Police Staffing Studies Guide Smarter Fiscal and Policy Decisions

*Jeremy Wilson, Michigan State University, Seth Williams, PFM Consulting, Ronal Serpas, Loyola University – New Orleans, and *Clifford A. Grammich, Birdhill Research and Communications

This work outlines what a best-practice workload-based staffing study entails, the data it requires, and how law enforcement agencies and government finance professionals can use its results.

Advancing Community Policing through Staffing: The Role of Recruitment Signals

*Jeremy M. Wilson and *Ethan M. Humphrey, Michigan State University

This work assessed 237 tactics for recruitment and selection of police officers for their likely impact on staffing levels, community-oriented policing, and several other dimensions. Tactics that were perceived to be highly effective for community policing were also likely to signal the practice of community policing to the community.

Anticipated Stigma and Burnout: The Impact of Concerns About Being Perceived as Racist Among Law Enforcement Officers

*Shahidul Hassan, Ohio State University, Bradley E. Wright and Justine E. Tinkler, University of Georgia

This work explores whether negative stereotypes create an identity threat that heightens anxiety and stress among law enforcement officers. The findings highlight the need for organizational interventions that reduce stereotype-related stress and support officer well-being.

Police Leadership Under Pressure: Job Demand Stress, Resources, and Psychological Health

Kelly Hankin, *Jacqueline M. Drew, and Jacob J. Keech, Griffith University

This work explores stress, support and psychological health of police leaders employed at a large Australian state police agency. The findings offer insights into the nature of stressors faced by mid-level and frontline police officers, as well as implications for attenuating psychological distress.

The Psychological Impact of Organisational and Operational Stressors on the Wellbeing of UK Detectives: A Study of Senior Investigating Officers

Liam Scott Curran, Ashley Cartwright, The University of Huddersfield, *Jacqueline M. Drew, Griffith University, and Jason Roach, The University of Huddersfield

This work examines organizational and operational stress among UK Senior Investigating Officers, finding that mental health issues related to organizational and operational stress are prevalent.

Officer Retention: A Comparative Analysis of Online Company Reviews by Australian and English Police Officers

*Toby Miles-Johnson, Western Sydney University, and Carol Cox-Forshaw, Liverpool John Moores University

This work explores police officers' experiences of employment by examining online company reviews posted by current and former employees. The findings suggest that challenges affecting retention are shared across international contexts and are influenced by a variety of factors.

Gendered Responses to Fairness: Organizational Justice and Police Training Receptivity

Yongjae Nam, The University of Texas at San Antonio, *Scott E. Wolfe, Michigan State University, and Yeon Soo Kim, Dongguk University

This work examines gender differences in police training motivation and receptivity. The findings suggest that organizational context shapes training outcomes in more complex ways than previously understood.

Mental Health and Police Calls for Service: A Comparison of Assessments by Police Dispatchers, Police Officers, and Mental Health Clinicians

Sue-Ming Yang, George Mason University, *Rylan Simpson, Simon Fraser University, I-Ching Jen and Beidi Dong, George Mason University, and Yi-Fang Lu, Academia Sinica

This work explores variation in how police dispatchers, police officers, and mental health clinicians classify the same calls for service in the context of mental health using real call data. The findings indicate heterogeneity in classifications.

Beyond the Big-City Bias: Assessing the Concentration of Calls-for-Service in Suburban and Rural Micro-Places

Matthew McGrath, *Bradley J. O'Guinn, and Cory P. Haberman, University of Cincinnati

This work assesses how police calls-for-service are distributed across micro-places. The findings suggest that calls are highly concentrated and tend to attract a mixture of criminal incidents, disorder, and service requests.

One-time Bonuses, Limited Returns: A Statewide Factorial Vignette Experiment of Law Enforcement Retention Intentions

*Jessica Huff, Cory P. Haberman, *Bradley J. O'Guinn, P. Trey Bussey, and Brenna Dunlap, University of Cincinnati

This work uses an experimental design to test whether retention bonuses impact police officers' willingness to extend their employment. The findings suggest that retention bonuses could reinforce commitment among officers planning to stay.

PSO Ponderings

PSO Ponderings highlights our partners through short, interview-style conversations. Each feature explores a partner's research and perspectives on key issues in police staffing. Here we highlight Dr. Bradley O'Guinn, Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida International University and Tara Hall, M.Ed., Office of Strategic Initiatives and Community Relations, Mesa Police Department.



Bradley O'Guinn, Ph.D.

What got you interested in studying police staffing?

Originally, I wasn't really interested in police staffing. I became involved through a program with the American Society of Evidence-Based Policing that paired researchers and practitioners on a research project. We met several times over a couple of years, which gave us the opportunity to work closely with practitioners. I connected with a group from Charleston, South Carolina. One of their biggest issues was retaining officers. They had no trouble recruiting people but keeping them was a challenge. They described it as trying to fill a bucket with a hole in the bottom: you can pour in as much water as you want, but it will never fill.

That got me thinking about the connection between staffing and evidence-based policing. If agencies don't have enough staff, how can they effectively implement evidence-based strategies? So, it was through the experience with the American Society of Evidence Based Policing and being immersed within Charleston's police department where we got to visit the agency, conduct focus groups, and examine their administrative data. Becoming immersed in the agency and the literature really sparked my interest in police staffing.

This also became a big part of my dissertation at the University of Cincinnati, where I examined the underlying theoretical mechanisms that might explain why someone wants to stay with or leave an agency.

What are some of the key findings/lessons from your research?

One of the biggest lessons has come from our Ohio law enforcement retention project. It's a large statewide study that included an organizational survey, officer surveys from 16 agencies, and interviews with officers from some of those agencies.

What stood out to me was that administrators' explanations for retention problems didn't always align with what officers told us. Many administrators pointed to financial considerations or competition from other law enforcement agencies as reasons why officers were leaving.

After speaking with officers and even looking through our survey data, I don't think it's fair to say that money doesn't matter. It matters to a certain extent; everybody needs money to live. But when we spoke with officers and looked at the survey data, many emphasized being treated fairly, being treated with respect, and feeling supported by their supervisors. Those were things I heard being consistently mentioned.

For police leaders, it can be difficult to look in the mirror and ask whether the way the agency is being run might be part of the problem. In our organizational survey, many agencies ranked factors related to administration and leadership much lower as reasons officers were leaving.

There appears to be a disconnect, which may help explain why some agencies continue to struggle with retention. If leaders believe the problem is driven by one factor while officers point to another, leaders may pursue solutions that don't address what is actually causing officers to leave. That was an important lesson from this project.

Who has influenced you most when it comes to how you approach your work?

It's my mentor, Cory Haberman. We've worked together for years, and he has always emphasized that our job is to follow the science. We don't begin a project with an agenda. We want to know what the data say, and we follow those findings, for better or worse.

He has also helped me see the importance of research that is meaningful to agencies. I've been fortunate to work on many projects in collaboration with police agencies, and I try to carry that approach into my own work.

Perhaps to my detriment, I don't always focus on the more academic side of things. For example, I'm not looking to test a theory every day. I'm more interested in the questions and problems that matter to practitioners and how I can help address them.

That direct connection with agencies was one of the things I valued most about my experience at the University of Cincinnati. As someone early in my career, I want to continue working with agencies and helping them answer questions that are important to them.

How has your research on police staffing evolved over time?

In the beginning, much of the research I did with my colleagues focused on administrative data. For example, we used agencies' staffing and hiring data to examine factors associated with how long someone stayed with an agency.

That was a good starting point, but I quickly realized there is only so much you can learn from administrative data. It often doesn't capture how officers feel, such as whether they believe they're treated fairly, treated with respect, or supported by others in the agency, including administrators.

We've increasingly moved more toward survey research, asking officers directly how they feel and examining how those feelings may relate to their intentions to leave. Of course, survey research has limitations too. One thing I've learned is that we need to be open to different types of evidence, data, and collection methods to get to the root of staffing questions.

More recently, we've been exploring how to incorporate experimental vignettes into research on staffing and retention. We want to approach these questions from a causal standpoint and strengthen the rigor of the research, rather than relying only on correlational and cross-sectional studies. The goal is to expand our knowledge while meeting the standards we consider important when assessing evidence.

What project or study are you currently most excited about?

The Ohio law enforcement retention study we discussed earlier. We're wrapping it up this month, and I'm really excited about it. It's been a great project, and we have several papers coming out of it. One has already been published with my colleague Jessie Huff as the lead author.

We plan to submit the report to the State of Ohio soon. I hope it reaches policymakers and state leaders and leads to meaningful changes or policy adoptions across the state. There are also opportunities to publish papers that will benefit the field, so I'm excited to share the work.

We've already presented parts of it at ASC and the American Society of Evidence-Based Policing. We presented at the Southern Criminal Justice Association, and the following week, we presented in New York State discussing our retention research at a public safety symposium.

I'm excited to share these results in different settings across the United States. Although the findings focus on Ohio, I hope they can have a broader impact in other jurisdictions nationwide.



Tara Hall, M.Ed.

Looking back, what's one experience on the job that has shaped how you approach policing today?

I've spent more than 20 years with Mesa Police as a professional staff member. My work has included our 911 center, forensics, hiring and background investigations, and leading programs and people, both sworn and professional staff. I now oversee our Office of Strategic Initiatives, which brings together our crime and data analysts, strategic planning and project management, and community programs to help the agency prepare for the future.

One experience that really shaped me was overseeing both sworn and professional staff in recruitment and community relations. Our agency has about 1,400 employees, with roughly 60% sworn and 40% professional staff. As a professional staff leader, I initially wondered how officers and sergeants would view me and whether they would accept my leadership.

I learned that building relationships and trust had to come first. Over time, I realized that people follow good leadership, and that isn't defined by a badge. That trust and willingness to follow my leadership didn't happen immediately, but they developed through our work together.

Even after moving into other roles, some of those employees still come to me for guidance. That experience showed me the influence a professional staff leader can have, and it's something I want to share with others who may have similar opportunities.

What do you wish researchers better understood about the realities of police staffing and operations?

I'd like to see more attention to professional staff leadership and career paths. Researchers are already exploring which responsibilities can move off officers' plates so they can focus on field work. I think we can also work together to help communities better understand the value professional staff bring to policing.

I co-authored an article for Police Chief Magazine, "Pioneering Integration and Leadership in Policing," about professional staff leadership, and I'd like to keep building on that conversation. Sometimes an

agency converts an investigative position to professional staff, but that employee still reports to a sergeant and has little opportunity to advance without moving into a completely different area.

Creating a position is only part of the work. Agencies need to be strategic about developing people, building relationships, and creating pathways into leadership. Simply placing someone in a newly converted senior role can be difficult for both the person and the organization, particularly in smaller agencies where one person may handle many responsibilities.

At Mesa, Chief Dan Butler has supported expanding opportunities at the command level and clarifying where professional staff leaders fit within the structure. Titles can be confusing when someone doesn't wear a uniform with visible rank. Clear roles and expectations help people work together. I'd like to see agencies grow stronger through professional staff and sworn leaders working side by side.

I*s there a research question you wish someone would study because it would really help practitioners?*

I'd like to see research that brings together professional staff roles and technology. Technology is increasingly doing work for agencies or supporting the work employees perform. As those responsibilities evolve, which roles could professional staff fill?

Having spent a lot of time in recruitment, I sometimes joke that we're recruiting more gamers now. People who are comfortable with technology may approach the work differently from what we traditionally associate with policing. I see that in analytical work too, with opportunities involving programming, engineering, and other technology-focused skills. The key is pairing those skills with the strong community connection that policing depends on.

What makes me optimistic is seeing newer employees and experienced members work together. Newer employees may quickly pick up modern dashboards and platforms because those tools are familiar from their education and everyday lives. Experienced employees bring knowledge about what has and hasn't worked in the past.

When those perspectives come together, I see a promising future. I'd like to better understand how technology and professional staff roles can develop together to support the work of our agencies.

How has partnering with MSU PSO influenced your work or decision-making?

In 2022, following social unrest and the pandemic, I was tasked with developing a strategic recruitment and retention plan. We wanted to modernize our hiring process and branding and show people why they should consider our agency.

Dr. Jeremy Wilson's research and articles helped me establish a foundation for that plan. I shared that work with my boss, who was an assistant chief at the time and is now our Chief, and we made the case to city council that recruitment needed greater investment. We already had a hiring structure, but we weren't hiring enough people quickly enough. Packaging that information helped the council see the need for funding.

Through that broader effort, we saw about a 30% increase in applicant show-up rates and made progress toward better representing our community, including more women in our applicant pool. We also worked to highlight aspects of policing beyond the equipment that recruitment messaging often

emphasizes. Being professional staff allowed me to stay focused on the two-year plan, while my sworn peers often rotate to new assignments.

That partnership has continued. Dr. Wilson and I have presented together on hiring and recruitment, and in my current role overseeing an office focused on data-driven decisions, I can still reach out to him for recommendations and perspective. Those ongoing relationships are valuable for practitioners as well as researchers.

What changes do you hope to see in the profession over the next decade?

I hope to see agencies invest in long-term career paths and leadership development for professional staff, including the programs sworn employees attend. High performers want new challenges, and part of why I've stayed with Mesa is that I've had room to grow.

I also encourage professional staff to build credibility and advocate for themselves. Being known for getting the work done matters, but as you advance, relationships, understanding others' perspectives, and negotiation become increasingly important. Those were skills I realized I needed to develop further.

Show up for opportunities that may traditionally be offered to sworn personnel, whether that's an event outside regular hours, marching with the department in a community parade, or an officer's memorial service. Participating represents the agency and shows our sworn counterparts that we're there to do the hard work too. Building those relationships and demonstrating your commitment can help prepare you for the opportunities ahead.

PSO Partners at the ASC Conference

The annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology (ASC), to be held in Chicago, Illinois from November 18 to 21, will feature presentations on staffing research by many partners of the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory (PSO). These presentations cover a range of topics on police staffing, including effective recruitment strategies, managing workload demands, promoting diversity, and more.

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Bolstering the Workforce: Effective Recruitment Tactics and Their Tradeoffs in Speed of Effect and Cost of Implementation

**Ethan Michael Humphrey and *Jeremy Wilson, Michigan State University, *Scott M. Mourtgos, University of South Carolina*

To stabilize their workforces, police agencies are experimenting with a variety of recruitment and retention tactics, from hiring bonuses, reducing selection standards, and speeding up the hiring process to creative social media features, enhanced compensation packages, and adjusting deployment. However, tactics that are effective in bolstering staff levels can vary in their suitability for meeting operational needs. With support from the COPS Office, we examined staffing tactics and their overall performance to help agencies prioritize the components of their staffing strategy based on their specific needs, enabling them to optimize their staffing processes. Drawing on open-source literature, we developed a census of 237 recruitment, selection, and retention tactics. We then asked multiple police

practitioners to rate the performance of each tactic on three dimensions: ability to affect staff levels, speed of effect, and cost of implementation. We analyzed the results to identify trade-offs in speed and cost among tactics considered most effective at increasing staff levels. Our results permit a nuanced way to consider "what works," illustrating that agencies can and should choose among tactics typically considered.

Recruiting with Cost in Mind: An Assessment of Police Staffing Tactics Perceived as Inexpensive

**Chase Flowers and *Jeremy Wilson, Michigan State University*

Police agencies continue to face staffing challenges, often while operating with constrained budgets. Numerous studies have proposed recruitment and retention strategies, but less is understood about which approaches practitioners perceive as both effective and affordable. This paper examines low-cost staffing tactics using data from a larger assessment of police recruitment and retention strategies conducted with practitioner input. Using ratings from 30 police practitioners across agencies of varying sizes and contexts, we evaluate 39 staffing tactics identified as either cost-neutral or cost-reducing. We assessed the tactics across multiple performance dimensions, including affordability, impacts on staffing levels, immediacy of effect, reduction in workload, ease of implementation, quality of policing, and advancement of community policing. Findings indicate that there are several inexpensive tactics, including developing a recruitment plan, streamlining the hiring process, easing financial requirements, and various outreach-based tactics that perform well across multiple staffing dimensions. The results highlight that agencies may not need to make significant financial investments to improve staffing, and that while all these tactics may be affordable, their performance can vary across performance dimensions. This COPS Office-supported study provides evidence-based guidance to help practitioners select low-cost staffing strategies that best match their agency's staffing challenges and goals.

Police Training and Certification Reforms Since 2019: A National Assessment of State-Level Changes

**Scott M. Mourtgos and *Ian Adams, University of South Carolina, *Jeremy Wilson, Michigan State University*

Across the country, police training and certification standards have been changing quickly in response to reform pressures, but we lack a clear picture of what has actually shifted and how those changes are working on the ground. In partnership with the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST), this National Institute of Justice-supported project is taking stock of those changes since 2019. We are collecting information from all 50 Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) agencies on new hiring requirements, training curricula, and certification/decertification standards. Just as important, we are meeting directly with POST Directors and representatives to learn how these changes came about, what problems they were designed to solve, and what challenges states are facing as they put them into practice. By combining hard data with the insights of the leaders responsible for implementation, this study provides the first national snapshot of how the most recent reform era has reshaped police training and certification. Our findings will give agencies and policymakers practical benchmarks for comparing their own approaches, highlight common challenges, and identify lessons that can guide more effective training and certification practices moving forward.

Organizational Learning and Workforce Strategy: A National Assessment of Police Recruitment Programs

**Tiana Gaudette and *Jeremy Wilson, Michigan State University*

Citing various factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the police reform movement, as well as changing demographics and generational preferences, many police agencies across the U.S. have been experiencing shortfalls of sworn staff. Efforts to address staffing issues may take ad hoc, piecemeal approaches and fail to build upon earlier efforts. This study develops lessons on organizational learning that will enable police agencies to increase their capacity for change in ways that facilitate their workforces. In this COPS Office-supported study, data are drawn from (1) a survey administered to 200 police recruiters in a random sample of large US police agencies about how their organization supports and uses learning at individual, team, and organizational levels, and (2) semi-structured interviews with practitioners to elicit more in-depth insights. The findings highlight lessons for agencies interested in applying principles of a learning organization, including the strengths that police organizations can continue to build on and the areas of greatest strategic leverage for development toward becoming a learning organization. Overall, this research will fill key gaps of knowledge regarding organizational learning in the context of police organizations and help agencies employ evidence-based principles to more efficiently build their workforces.

Managing Workload Demand with Non-Sworn Professional Staff: A Case Study of Civilian Investigators in a Large, Urban Department

**Steve Chermak and *Jeremy Wilson, Michigan State University*

Among the ways that police agencies can bolster their force is through the use of professional staff. Nonsworn staff are increasing their presence in agencies throughout the United States and in areas that have traditionally been limited to sworn personnel. One relatively new area in which professional staff are becoming present is in investigations. Civilians may work in units investigating internal affairs, property crimes, and violent crimes, including homicides. With support from the National Institute of Justice, this research explores the use of civilian investigators in a major American city. Using interviews with civilian and sworn personnel, it explores questions such as the first use of civilian investigators, their educational and professional background, the specific tasks they perform, their relationship with and acceptance by sworn personnel, how their use and administration have changed over time, and likely paths forward for them whether in the organization or elsewhere. The research should be of interest to agencies already employing professional staff as well as to those who are considering them to better leverage their numbers of sworn personnel.

Examining the Impacts Shift Assignments Have Towards Officers' Perceived Organizational Support

**Justin Lewis, Dennis Hippert, and Thomas Hughes, University of Louisville*

This research seeks to assess the relationship between shift assignment and officers' perceived organizational support. Specifically, we utilize survey data from patrol officers to examine the correlation between shift assignments (day, night, swing) and organizational support levels using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Findings, specific policy recommendations, and future research directions will be discussed.

Normalizing Wellness in Policing: Insights from a Multi-Year Mental Health Check-In Pilot

*Lexi E. Lane, *Samantha Clinkinbeard, and Champ Champenstein, University of Nebraska Omaha*

Police officers face high levels of occupational stress, yet stigma towards mental health can limit help-seeking. This study examines a multi-year partnership evaluating a mandatory mental health check-in program implemented within a Midwestern police department. Designed to reduce stigma and normalize help-seeking, the program provides officers with annual, confidential sessions with culturally competent clinicians. Using a mixed-methods design, the data were collected across multiple waves, including pre- and post-surveys, attendance records, and interviews with clinicians and key personnel. The evaluation focused on program implementation, participation, and officer perceptions of stigma and policy support. Officers reported reduced concerns about negative consequences of seeking help and stronger beliefs that check-ins can reduce stigma. Qualitative findings highlight benefits, including increased awareness of resources and opportunities to decompress, alongside implementation challenges, including scheduling barriers, practitioner turnover, and concerns about mandatory participation. Lessons learned emphasize the importance of flexibility, accessibility, and sustained efforts. Preliminary findings highlight key considerations for program design, including reducing barriers and increasing buy-in, and emphasizing the need for future research on long-term outcomes of mandatory wellness interventions.

Time Will Tell: The Influence of Time-Into-Shift on Police Discretion and Enforcement

*Marc Olson and *Ian Adams, University of South Carolina*

Discretion in policing is typically described as a function of who officers are and with whom they encounter. However, far less attention has been paid to when discretionary decisions are made and how these decisions change over time. We theorize discretion as a process that temporally evolves, testing whether officer behavior systematically changes throughout the course of a shift. Using four years of data from a large municipal police agency, we analyze 2.2 million enforcement actions across 3.4 million officer-hours of data, leveraging overlapping shift structures to identify within-officer changes in discretionary behavior. We examine discretionary actions in three dimensions: frequency (discretionary interactions per officer-hour), quality (priority level of discretionary interactions), and thoroughness (time spent on-scene). As shifts near their end, we identify meaningful evolutions in officer-initiated activity, time spent on scene, and incident priority level. These findings hold implications for scheduling, resource allocation, and future analyses of police discretion.

Why Officers Leave Policing: A Study of a Large Agency's Loss of Officers Between 2018-2025

**Wei-Gin Lee and Cynthia Lum, George Mason University*

Police retention has been a growing issue among law enforcement agencies in the United States. Studies on police employment crisis have increased in the past two decades due to major events, including highly publicized use of force incidents, the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests of the police that followed, the national discussion of defunding the police, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the changeover in top leadership at the time, which have been hypothesized to have caused the significant declines in sworn officer employment. However, few studies research officers who have left the policing profession prematurely and little is known about the reasons why they chose to leave. This study aims to

understand which factors (e.g., individual, organizational, external) influence officers' intentions to leave by collaborating with the Seattle Police Department (SPD), which lost 25% of its police force between 2020 and 2023. This study surveys the entire targeted population who are eligible for retirement, or who are even eligible to retire, before they intend to retire. Surveys were sent to the entire population of 850 who retired or voluntarily separated from the agency between 2018 and 2025. Future research and policy implications are also discussed.

Understanding Police Employment: How Online Reviews Affect Recruitment and Explain Retention in Police Organisations

**Toby Miles-Johnson, Western Sydney University*

Before submitting a job application many candidates read online company reviews. This enables them to evaluate the organisation, its culture, occupational practices, perceptions of the workplace, and reasons why employees resign. While online company reviews may be perceived as a 'rant' and less credible in terms of offering a balanced critique, the information shared within them prompts inquiry regarding whether they shape perceptions of employment. In professions such as policing that struggle to overcome public opinion regarding reputation, an analysis of this often-overlooked data set offers a unique perspective regarding why applicants may not pursue a submission and why officers resign. Accordingly, online company reviews evaluating police officer employment (post Covid) were downloaded from one of the largest online employment sites. The analysis indicates that whilst not being able to determine recruitment outcomes, the information contained within them is likely to affect potential applicants and increase disinterest in policing careers. This will be discussed in the presentation.

An Experimental Test of Social Media Recruitment Posts in Fostering Policing Career Interest

**Ryan Sandrin, Simon Fraser University*

Police agencies continue to experience challenges with recruiting new officers. At the same time, ensuring that recruitment efforts support the development of a representative police agency is an important consideration. Police recruitment materials may offer one avenue for achieving both objectives. As part of the present research, I employ a 2 x 2 experimental design to examine how manipulating the imagery (representation of officers) and textual caption (messaging for recruiting a representative agency) of social media recruitment posts affect undergraduate students' interest in potentially pursuing a career with a fictitious police department. Preliminary findings reveal that manipulating social media recruitment posts affects participants' potential interest in the fictious police department. In light of the staffing challenges experienced across policing, I situate my findings in relation to policy and practice.

Evaluating Diversity-Related Practices and Women's Representation in Policing: From Policy to Progress?

*Janine Namoro and *Rylan Simpson, Simon Fraser University*

Women continue to be underrepresented as police officers in the USA. In response, many American police agencies have adopted diversity-related practices to help improve the representation of women in policing. Drawing upon data from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics

(LEMAS) as well as Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) datasets, this study examines the relationship between the adoption of various diversity-related practices and the representation of women in policing over a multi-year period. The findings reveal interesting patterns related to diversity-related practices and the proportion of female police officers in American police agencies. Many police initiatives aim to increase the representation of women in policing. The findings from this study highlight the potential implications of various diversity-related practices for shaping the police workforce.

From Learning to Legitimacy: Exploring How Training Influences Officers' Self-Legitimacy

**Nathan Cronin, *Scott Wolfe, *Jeff Rojek, Allison Rojek, Michigan State University, and Victor Manjarrez, University of Texas at El Paso*

This study examines how police training relates to officers' internal sense of legitimacy, also called self-legitimacy. While research on police legitimacy has widely focused on how citizens evaluate police authority, far less attention has been given to how officers themselves perceive the moral justification of their authority. Drawing on self-legitimacy theory and human capital theory, this study investigates whether officers' perceptions of training are associated with stronger beliefs in their rightful authority. Data comes from a survey of United States Border Patrol (USBP) agents in the El Paso Sector. The analysis evaluates the relationship between perceived training and self-legitimacy while accounting for organizational justice at the immediate supervisor and sector leadership levels and key demographic factors. Findings indicate that agents who report more positive training experiences also report higher levels of self-legitimacy. Although organizational justice is also strongly associated with self-legitimacy, training remains a significant predictor even when these factors are included in the models. The results suggest that training and ongoing professional development play an important role in shaping officers' internal confidence in their authority and highlight the importance of training and organizational fairness in strengthening legitimacy within policing organizations.

Revisiting the Koper Curve: Survival Time and Dosage Effects in Violent Crime Hot Spots

*Brandon Tregle, University of South Carolina, *Jessica Huff, University of Cincinnati, Stephanie M. Cardwell, Rob Tillyer, and Michael R. Smith, University of Texas at San Antonio*

Prior research suggests that police presence in crime hot spots reaches peak effectiveness (i.e., the longest survival time until another crime occurs) at approximately fifteen minutes. While this finding has been influential in guiding patrol deployment strategies, very few studies have replicated these findings. Additionally, little research has explored whether repeated treatment doses influence crime patterns over time. This study revisits the Koper Curve by examining survival time and dosage effects associated with a hot spots strategy in four U.S. cities. Using official crime data and officer hot spot mark outs, we examine violent crime incidents in micro locations during and after periods of police presence. Treatment doses consisted of short officer visits in designated hot spots at designated hours. We analyze the time between patrol presence and subsequent crime incidents. We also examine crime patterns during and after treatment periods. Finally, we assess whether repeated patrol exposure influences survival time in these areas. Our results extend the line of literature around the Koper Curve by examining survival time across repeated treatment doses and longer intervention periods. These findings also contribute to understanding how patrol dosage and duration influence deterrence in crime hot spots and offer guidance for optimizing patrol deployment strategies.

Dynamic Effects of High Visibility Hot Spots Patrols: A Multi-city Assessment of Deterrence Mechanisms

**Jessica Huff, University of Cincinnati, Brandon Tregle, University of South Carolina, Stephanie M. Cardwell, Rob Tillyer, and Michael R. Smith, University of Texas at San Antonio*

Over three decades of research demonstrates that police patrols in hot spots can reduce crime. Less is known, however, about how the effects of these interventions evolve over time. Additionally, few studies have explored whether repeated exposure to patrol presence produces sustained deterrence in micro locations. This study evaluates the dynamic effects of high visibility hot spot patrols on violent crime across four U.S. cities. A small number of high crime grids were identified as hot spots and received officer mark outs of 15 minutes. The analysis examines crime trends within treated locations before, during, and after intervention periods. We explored the effect of cumulative treatment exposure and time since last treatment. Results suggest that repeated exposure to patrol presence is associated with lower crime levels in several sites. The findings are consistent with deterrence mechanisms that operate through sustained perceptions of risk. Our results shed light on the durability of long term hot spots policing strategies and provide practical guidance for optimizing patrol deployment strategies.

The Role of Community Involvement in the Adoption of Community Policing Training in Police Academies

**Ethan Michael Humphrey, Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory*

Community policing emphasizes prioritizing and integrating the needs and perspectives of the communities police serve, yet little is known about whether this principle extends to police academy training. This study examines whether community involvement in academy processes is associated with the presence of different types of community policing training, addressing how external stakeholders may influence training priorities. Using the Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies (CLETA) dataset, this study assesses two forms of community involvement: participation in curriculum development and involvement in academy oversight. Logistic regression models are employed to estimate the likelihood that academies include community policing training, controlling for academy type and region. The results indicate that community involvement is positively associated with the presence of certain community policing training types. Overall, these findings suggest that incorporating community perspectives into academy governance may increase the adoption of training aligned with community-oriented policing principles.

BWCs and AI: Results from a National Survey and Interviews of Law Enforcement Agencies

*Shellie E. Solomon, Justice & Security Strategies, Inc., and *Jeff Rojek, Michigan State University*

Body-worn cameras have proliferated across the United States since at least 2014. During the last dozen years the hardware and software for BWCs has evolved and changed at a rapid pace. With the emergence and development of AI tools, some agencies are taking a careful look at those tools while others are investing and committing to them quickly. This paper is based on findings from a 2025 national survey of law enforcement agencies and intensive interviews with a sample of those agencies in 2026. The authors will discuss the results of the interviews, providing in-depth feedback about digital evidence management and AI. Importantly, the paper explores the evolving role of AI in evidence review, redaction, and incident analysis, and how agencies are integrating BWCs into operational management.

Roundtable: Police Workforce Management: Research, Insights and Opportunities by Partners of the MSU Police Staffing Observatory

*Chair: *Jeremy Wilson, Michigan State University*

*Discussants: *Vivian Aranda-Hughes, Michigan State University, *Marshall Jones, Florida Tech, *Tanya Meisenholder, New York University, *Jennifer Rineer, RTI International, *Rylan Simpson, Simon Fraser University*

Police agencies across the United States and internationally continue to face ongoing challenges related to workforce planning, staffing allocation, recruitment, and retention. This roundtable will feature an open and organic discussion among partners of the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory (PSO) and participants in attendance. The PSO is a global consortium of police staffing scholars and practitioners working collaboratively to develop and share research that informs police workforce strategy and development. This session is designed to encourage dialogue and the sharing of insights from PSO partners' ongoing work and lessons from the field, as well as to discuss PSO activities and collaboration opportunities. Among discussion topics will be workforce planning, allocation modeling, recruitment and retention strategies, leadership and supervision, staffing competition, and policing-corrections intersections. All in attendance are encouraged to actively participate by sharing their own experiences, observations, research, questions and opportunities.

Gendered Paychecks Behind the Badge: Decomposing the Police Gender Wage Gap in the United States

**Erik Alda, Marymount University*

Police agencies are often viewed as highly structured workplaces, with formal pay scales, union contracts, and civil service protections that should limit wage discrimination. Yet women officers in the United States continue to earn less than men. This paper investigates the gender wage gap among sworn police and sheriff's patrol officers using pooled Current Population Survey microdata accessed via IPUMS. I construct log hourly wages and estimate Mincer earnings functions that incorporate human capital, demographic, and institutional covariates. Oaxaca–Blinder decompositions are used to separate the wage gap into explained and unexplained components, while Gelbach decompositions attribute shifts in the unexplained portion to blocks of covariates such as education, union coverage, family status, and assignment proxies. Results show that less than half of the gender wage gap is explained by observed differences, and that family status and assignment variables disproportionately widen the unexplained share, consistent with a motherhood penalty. Robustness checks using alternative samples, earnings measures, agency types, and ACS data confirm the stability of these patterns. The study highlights how formal pay structures can coexist with persistent gender inequality and demonstrates the value of decomposition methods for understanding equity in policing.

Mapping Research on Women in Policing: A Scoping Review of Workplace Experiences and Behavioral Outcomes

**Rachael Rief, *Samantha Clinkinbeard, and Gabriella Burt, University of Nebraska Omaha*

Research on women in policing spans two primary domains, studies examining workplace experiences—including organizational culture, discrimination, inclusion, and burnout—and studies exploring gender differences in behavioral outcomes such as use of force, discretion, and communication. Despite a growing body of literature, no comprehensive synthesis exists to map the full scope of this evidence. This scoping review addresses that gap by systematically identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing research on women in policing published between 1964 and 2025. Following PRISMA ScR guidelines, searches were conducted across multiple academic databases. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were eligible but had to include female officers in their samples and individual-level analyses. Outcomes are assessed by statistical significance, effect sizes, or thematic patterns depending on study design. Results map study scope and characteristics, offering a baseline for future scholarship. This review represents a comprehensive effort to consolidate what is known—and what remains unknown—about women's status and experiences in policing.

New Partner

The PSO welcomes a new partner: Wei-Gin Lee.



Wei-Gin Lee is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University. He received his M.A. and B.A. in Criminology from Central Police University in Taiwan. He worked as a police lieutenant in Taiwan for nine years. His research interests include policing, cybercrime, police retention and turnover, quantitative methods, victimization surveys, and crime prevention. His dissertation is titled "Why Officers Leave Policing: A Study of a Large Agency's Loss of Officers Between 2018-2025," supervised by Prof. Cynthia Lum.

For further information on MSU PSO Partners, see https://cj.msu.edu/community/pso/directory

Professional Activities



Filosa Defends Dissertation

Neil Filosa has successfully defended his dissertation at Michigan State University on the topic of the police labor market during the early 2020's, with an emphasis on retention and applications during this period.



O’Guinn Joins Faculty at FIU; Wins ASC Division of Policing Award

Bradley J. O’Guinn has joined the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida International University as an Assistant Professor. was selected for the 2026 American Society of Criminology Division of Policing Outstanding Student Dissertation Award. It recognizes high-quality dissertations with strong potential impact to the field of policing research.





Geary and Huff Named ASEBP Trailblazers

At the 2026 Annual Society of Evidence-Based Policing Conference, T.J. Geary and Jessica Huff were recognized as Evidence-Based Policing Trailblazers. It recognizes those who have made exceptional contributions to advancing effective, science-driven policing practices.



Padilla Wins ASC Division of Policing Award

Kathleen Padilla was selected for the 2026 American Society of Criminology Division of Policing Early Career Award. It recognizes those who have made outstanding contributions to policing research early in their career.



Oddsson Holds Policing Conference

The 9th Policing and Society Conference was held at the University of Iceland on September 30 and October 1, 2026. The conference was a great success with nearly 300 attendees in total.



Lee Wins ASC Division of Policing Award

Wei-Gin Lee was selected for the 2026 American Society of Criminology Division of Policing Student Travel Award.



Meisenholder Wins 30x30 Award

At the 2026 National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE) conference, Tanya Meisenholder received the Professional Staff award. It recognizes those who support NAWLEE’s mission to "Lead-Inspire-Mentor."



Gibbs Promoted to Full Professor; Named Associate Editor of Journal

Jennifer Gibbs was promoted to Professor of Criminal Justice in the School of Public Affairs at Penn State Harrisburg in July 2026. She has been named Associate Editor of the Journal of Criminal Justice Education, an official publication of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.



Wolfe Wins Faculty Research Award

Dr. Scott Wolfe, Professor in the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University (MSU), has earned the 2026 Faculty Research Award from the MSU College of Social Science. It recognizes those whose research has made a significant impact on their field of study.

Newsletter Archive

Our newsletters are online. Click here to read the most recent or previous issues.

About the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory

The Police Staffing Observatory (PSO) is a global collaborative of academics, scholars, practitioners, and students working with Michigan State University to promote evidence-based police workforce research, strategy, and operations. Its primary aims are to advance police workforce knowledge and its application by

- Conducting timely and innovative research on critical aspects of a wide-range of police staffing issues, resulting in scholarly and practitioner-oriented publications
- Creating a venue for the network of police staffing scholars to share opportunities, discuss ideas, and enable collaborations
- Facilitating researcher-practitioner partnerships and technical assistance
- Serving as a repository and dissemination vehicle for the research of collaborators so that it is easily discoverable by practitioners and others.

The PSO conducts research and outreach across the staffing system:

Allocation and deployment

Analytics and performance assessment

Attrition and retention

Cohort management

Community representation

Differential response

Evidence-based planning

Innovation and technology

Officer wellness

Organizational learning

Performance objectives

Program building

Recruitment

Resource optimization and ROI

Selection and hiring

Standards, training and certification

Succession planning

Supervision and span of control

Systems approaches

Workload demand and supply

Work schedules

Through its facilitation of research and outreach, the PSO is a community of science that ultimately serves as a valuable resource for the community of practice.