



Police Apprenticeships for Youth Can Enhance Recruitment and the Quality of Officers While Lowering Costs

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Police officers play a vital role in keeping communities safe and enforcing the law. Yet, recent years have witnessed increased retirements, high vacancy rates, and difficulties in recruiting cohorts of new officers. Public distrust of the police and concerns about excessive police violence have exacerbated the recruitment, training, and retention problems of police departments. Officers face extraordinary public scrutiny while remaining vigilant in fighting crime. Still, salaries and fringe benefits for police generally well exceed compensation for other professions that do not require a bachelor's degree. This policy brief examines the potential for the apprenticeship model to attract a wide group of applicants, to enhance the quantity and quality of training, to improve selection into the full-time force and to do so without increasing department costs. We begin by reviewing the strengths and limitations of the standard recruitment, training, and retention practices that departments use. Next, we describe the police youth apprenticeship model, highlighting several of its key advantages. We then describe how the police department of Fairfax County, Virginia, implements the youth apprentice model to its advantage in recruitment, retention, and quality, and plausibly reduces costs in doing so. We conclude by arguing that police work is a natural fit for on-the-job learning and identify areas for further research into police apprenticeship.

New Challenges in Recruitment, Training, and Retention

Until recently, the police profession attracted far more applicants than the number of openings. However, between 2020 and 2022, the share of police departments reporting having a hard time filling policing positions jumped from 25 percent to 78 percent (PERF 2023). Departments have experienced higher than usual rates of retirement and resignations, along with far fewer applications. In many jurisdictions, the problem is severe. According to Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), “Police agencies face no greater challenge today than recruiting and retaining enough qualified officers to meet rising demands to provide services and address violent crime.” The headline of a recent story in *The Washington Post*¹ captures these trends: “Police agencies are desperate to hire. But they say few want the job.” Several departments report large numbers of unfilled positions, such as San Francisco (down 600 officers), Phoenix (down 500), and Washington, DC (down 700). Former Baltimore deputy police commissioner Jason Johnson sees a decline in professional esteem and an abandonment of law and order as partly responsible. Some departments have relaxed their entry standards, leading in at least one case to tragic incidents of police abuse.

Concerns about recruitment and hiring extend beyond total numbers to ethnic, racial and gender diversity. National figures show African American and Hispanic officers make up 13 percent and 18 percent of police officers. Although these percentages are virtually identical to their respective population shares,² they are lower in many cases than the communities they serve. Moreover, some evidence suggests that African American and Hispanic officers are less likely to make stops and arrests of African American civilians. Women officers, who make up only 17 percent of police officers, appear to use less force against all racial groups than do male officers.

A report published by PERF in August 2023 presents the recruitment problems facing police departments and recommends several steps to attract more—and potentially more capable—officers. The report advises agencies to remove barriers to entry, such as inappropriate tests, address agency culture to ensure an inclusive environment, create a strong mentoring program, try to build community support, and better understand the values and aspirations of young applicants. Some departments are reviewing physical requirements, while others are examining educational requirements, though most departments continue to require a high school diploma. These steps will advance the goal of attracting a broader range of candidates, especially in terms of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity.

The application process is only the first step toward becoming a police officer. Departments rely on a variety of screening devices, including personal histories, psychological evaluations, medical examinations, physical fitness, lie detector tests, and repeated interviews before accepting applicants into their programs. The costs to police departments of recruitment and screening can be substantial.

Many high schools offer CTE classes (Career and Technical Education), including courses in criminal justice. But most high schoolers interested in police work as a career have few options at 18; they could enlist in the military, attend college, learn a trade ... but no option will prepare them for the exact skills needed in policing. Police departments implementing apprenticeship programs could consider building a direct talent pipeline to route highly qualified young people from the neighborhoods they serve into a

career with the department. Fairfax County is unusual in offering such a program to recent high school graduates. This opportunity allowed one of the authors (Benjamin Klosky) to apply to Fairfax County Police, while he was applying to colleges as a high school senior. Without FCPD's unusual talent pipeline, the authors' options for entry to policework would have been considerably diminished. The department conducted the requisite background clearing and medical tests while he was still waiting to hear back from university admissions offices. This is how the military, colleges, and trades approach attracting and hiring highly engaged youth employees. Police departments can take advantage of the same process.

The background clearance process can take a *long* time for recruits. Police applicants must be willing and able to wait six months to a year to begin working or attending the academy from the time they first apply because of the lengthy process to clear an applicant. The screening includes background checks, a lie detector test, drug tests, and multiple interviews. Youth apprentices are screened as well, but through a shorter process.

The opportunity cost of the process can be high for young people trying to decide between various career paths at 18; they may feel they do not have nine months available to wait to hear back from a department before deciding on their next move. However, college admissions can also be slow.³ The department can build contacts through CTE courses and teach prospective applicants useful information like radio nomenclature, county geography, and the basics of constitutional law, long before new apprentices set foot in a police station. Departments can encourage interested high school seniors to apply and commit to the apprenticeship program much like a college or trade program and take advantage of the school year's duration to clear them for police work.

The apprenticeship pipeline for young talent is a promising option for departments in a time when many departments struggle to recruit new officers. The criteria that departments otherwise use to screen for applicants, like college degrees, can select against the diverse talent that departments are striving to attract. Policing is a career that pays above-average salaries and exceptional retirement benefits but is viewed as risky—and recently, as less respected. Although most students with medium or high academic skills choose college in lieu of work, many potentially excellent officers cannot afford to finance tuition or forgo earnings during that critical age period of 17 ½ to 20. Police apprenticeships pay wages in return for solid, productive work. The apprenticeship program offers a new group of talented young men and women a path forward to a productive career in police work. And in many cases, the department benefits from the diverse set of well-qualified police officers from local communities who understand local cultures and languages.

Standard Police Training

After the screening process, applicants who are accepted as police officer recruits enter a police academy. Generally, candidates receive a salary during their time in the academy. For example, Philadelphia pays recruits a salary of \$61,888 for this period, or 93.5 percent of the \$66,183 salary that will be earned upon graduating the academy and starting as a police officer.

A 2021 report by Emily Buehler for the US Department of Justice presents extensive data on the practices of police academies throughout the country, based on responses from 681 police academies that trained nearly 60,000 recruits (Buehler 2021). The curricula for police academies vary but generally include a long list of elements. Overall, the core basic training programs averaged 833 hours and the field training programs averaged 508 hours.

The Buehler study quantifies the extensive range of common practices. Table 1 shows each subject area by the share of recruits taking such training and the number of hours devoted to the training. Note the long list of topics, though some involve a modest number of hours. Over 90 percent of recruits receive instruction in direct police actions, including firearms skills, patrol procedures, defensive tactics, investigations, interrogation, evidence processing, domestic violence, basic First Aid/CPR, de-escalation, traffic accidents, DUI/sobriety, active shooter response, sexual assault response, emergency vehicle operation, and nonlethal weapons. Nearly all are instructed using at least one type of reality-based scenario, where recruits are evaluated on their response to actors, in an acted-out simulation of a situation they may encounter as police officers. Other topics are also highly relevant to police work but have a general character. These include communications, report writing, ethics and integrity, criminal/constitutional law, traffic law, mental health crisis intervention, juvenile justice law, health and fitness, cultural diversity, and crimes against children. Although most recruits learn about community policing, an average of only 11 hours was devoted to community-building and 13 hours to mediation and conflict management. Recruits spent the highest number of hours in firearms skills (73 hours), defensive tactics (61 hours), and patrol procedures (52 hours). Academies reported that, as of 2018, about 88 percent of male recruits and 81 percent female recruits completed this basic training.

The vast majority of academies (83.4 percent) require some field training but only about half require such training for all recruits. The average length of field training for academies requiring the training was 508 hours. Combining the hours spent in basic and field training yields an average of 1,341 hours, or about two-thirds of a full-time, full-year job of 2,000 hours.

The structure and content of field trainings vary widely across programs (Jenkins et al. 2021). Yet, field training is vital. A recent study reported that the behavior of officers correlates directly with the field training they receive; whether officers go through field training appears to exert a statistically significant negative effect on subsequent allegations of misconduct brought against trainees. Still, the specifics of how field training affects outcomes are unclear. This gap in knowledge contributes to the lack of standardization in field training. Jenkins and colleagues reported that trainees often hear, “forget what you learned in the academy—the real learning begins now,” signifying the disconnect between classroom lessons and the real-world setting.

TABLE 1

Share of Recruits Receiving Academy Training in Various Subject Areas and Average Hours of Instruction

Operations	Percent of recruits receiving training (%)	Average hours of instruction
Basic First Aid/CPR	92.9	24
Computers	65.2	12
Emergency vehicle operation	96.8	40
Evidence processing	96.8	16
Intelligence gathering	66.9	10
Interrogation	96.6	13
Investigations	97.5	36
Patrol procedures	99.0	52
Radar/lidar	40.8	18
Report writing	99.7	24
Traffic accidents	97.3	26
Weapons/defensive tactics		
De-escalation/verbal judo	92.3	18
Defensive tactics	99.7	61
Firearms skills	99.5	73
Nonlethal weapons	91.4	20
Legal		
Criminal/constitutional law	99.3	51
Juvenile justice law	97.8	11
Traffic law	98.6	26
Community policing		
Community building	79.5	11
Crime mapping	23.3	6
Cultural diversity	96.8	14
Mediation/conflict management	77.9	13
Problem solving	79.5	16
Research methods to study crime/disorder	36.8	9
Self-improvement		
Basic foreign language	24.0	14
Communications	92.2	16
Ethics and integrity	99.6	12
Health and fitness	97.0	50
Professionalism	89.4	12

Stress prevention	89.9	9
Special topics		
Active shooter response	91.6	14
Clandestine drug labs	67.9	5
Crimes against children	95.2	8
Cyber/internet crimes	62.3	4
Domestic violence	98.8	15
DUI/sobriety	95.2	25
Elder abuse	78.8	4
Emergency management	82.3	9
Gangs	89.1	5
Hate/bias crimes	86.9	5
Human trafficking	73.1	5
Mental illness	98.1	16
Opioids	84.7	5
Sexual assault	97.0	7
Sexual harassment	80.0	4
Terrorism	88.5	6
Victim response	88.1	6
Total hours		856

Source: Table 8 in Buehler (2021).

A Natural Fit for Youth Apprenticeship

Police experience a wide range of encounters with varying degrees of potential danger, especially in pursuing criminals and making arrests. Handling a wide range of situations effectively requires adaptability and sensitivity. Officers must learn to contain dangerous situations and deal with unavoidable dangers by gaining extensive field experience with highly effective officers. Experience is also important in fulfilling other key job functions, such as how best to undertake investigations, handle evidence, write reports, and interact sensitively with local communities. Given the demanding nature of policing, learning through experience is essential. That's why the apprenticeship model, with its emphasis on learning in real world situations, makes sense for training police. Instead of learning primarily in classrooms or simulated settings provided by police academies, apprenticeships ensure that every police officer engages in years of experiential learning. As a result, police officers trained through three-year apprenticeships alongside some police academy courses will be more likely to perform well in the field than officers trained in six-month police academies.

The data from table 1 indicate that the academies spent nearly 80 hours on de-escalation and defensive tactics, another 29 hours on mediation and problem-solving, and 14 hours on active shooter

response. Thus, training future police officers for these critical and difficult tasks amounted to only about three weeks of classroom instruction. Subsequent field training can provide additional experience.

In contrast, youth apprentices may spend over a year closely watching experienced officers encounter real world situations that require effective approaches to de-escalation, defensive tactics, mediation and problem-solving. In the case of Fairfax County, experienced officers typically volunteer to conduct field training for apprentices. But departments could be selective by assigning high performing officers who teach and mentor well to train apprentices in the field, which may improve training outcomes (Getty, Worrall, and Morris 2016). Similarly, experience by apprentices on patrols is far longer and far more closely tied to the field than the training of future officers in police academies. Certainly, the precise content of what an apprentice experiences may vary from program to program. However, the far longer duration of the apprenticeship compared to the police academy model affords departments the opportunity to ensure that future police officers encounter a variety of real work situations calling for at ages 17 and 18 can help with recruitment, since the pool of high school students with interests in police work is far easier to identify than the pool of adult applicants to police academies. Apprenticeships allow departments a far longer period of observing recruits before they become officers than traditional police academies. As a result, departments are more likely to weed out potential officers who demonstrate problematic behavior or who simply are less able to cope with the challenges of police work. Sadly, the country has witnessed tragic and highly publicized cases in which police behaved poorly, leading to unnecessary injuries or fatalities, and tarnishing the reputation of police. Avoiding these incidents should be a high priority for departments. Ensuring extensive field experience and having sufficient time to select only recruits who demonstrate sound judgment can help.

Still another advantage of apprenticeships over the traditional academy approach is financial. Paying recruits high wages (almost equivalent to officers' wages, in some cases) during their time in the police academy is expensive. Youth apprentices receive wages while performing productive tasks that departments would otherwise pay administrative workers or officers high wages to undertake. Police departments can recoup some or all of the costs of apprenticeships through the productive labor performed by apprentices. The departments also gain from freeing up officers to do field work that only an officer can perform; the apprentices are able to supplant work that is unnecessarily performed by trained police officers. Often, the departments actually save money in training officers by using the apprenticeship model. We document these savings for Fairfax County, Virginia, in the case description that follows.

Apprenticing Police Work: The Case of Fairfax County

The Fairfax County Police Department, like a few other peer institutions, offers a law enforcement “cadet” program.⁴ Individuals between the ages of 17½ and 20 can work for the department while gaining crucial training in the skills needed for law enforcement. As noted above, the program has all the characteristics of an apprenticeship program but is not a registered apprenticeship program. Because the nature of the program is to provide the distinct skills needed for policing, there is no education

requirement beyond a high school diploma. Fairfax County pays cadets a wage from the first day they begin. The police department conducts competency checks on the incoming cadets (hereafter called apprentices), including polygraphs, fitness tests, medical exams, psychological testing, and a background investigation. Because the only requirements for apprentices are motivation and quality of fit for a policing role, the apprenticeship program can recruit from a diverse pool of candidates that might otherwise be screened out by degree or experience requirements. Many apprentices in the program are from minority communities served by the department and many speak second or third languages, an invaluable skill for first responders.

Drawing on the experience of co-author Klosky, we highlight key aspects of the Fairfax County program. Youth apprentices gain exposure to various aspects of law enforcement while doing productive work for Fairfax County. Within the span of a week, an apprentice might work on helicopter maintenance, sit in on a police academy class, learn emergency vehicle operations, practice radio procedure, handle evidence for criminal cases, participate in plainclothes stings, attend court, and ride along with the patrol bureau. Apprentices learn valuable skills for law enforcement through supervised practice, such as running the department's fingerprinting desk and learning emergency vehicle operation while assisting with fleet logistics. The department reduces the cost of providing services, and the apprentice gains directly relevant skills, work experience, and a wage.

Within a month of graduating from high school, an apprentice can perform necessary work for the police department while receiving on-the-job training relevant to being a law enforcement officer. The apprentices shift around the police department in three-month rotations, assigned to "bureaus" that perform various law enforcement services for the county. Every assignment benefits both the department, by filling critical labor needs, and the cadet, by building specialized skills necessary for police work. These are skills that could not be gained in a classroom.

It is not uncommon to see a Fairfax County cadet/apprentice aboard the police helicopter (called Fairfax One), assisting tactical flight officers in pursuit of suspects, at the age of 18. While assigned to the helicopter division, an apprentice might participate in training for medevacs, learn radio protocol, and assist with helicopter maintenance. The apprentice rides along in a helicopter while helping the division with otherwise highly burdensome tasks; low skill labor, such as cleaning the helicopter's dust and debris, is delegated to apprentices, freeing flight officers to focus on specialized paramedic training, advanced maintenance, or testifying in court. Assigned to the academy for theoretical instruction (related technical instruction or RTI in apprenticeship terms), an apprentice might sit in on academy training, learn firearms safety, participate in emergency vehicle operations, and assist police instructors with practical assessments. The Fairfax academy benefits greatly from the additional labor, and the cadet gains exposure to academy training. The cadets help run Taser and pepper spray training for recruits enrolled in the academy and spend time at Emergency Vehicles Operations Center (EVOC), where they help EVOC instructors operate the facility. In return, apprentices can participate in instruction at EVOC and practicing operating patrol vehicles and handling a hydroplaning vehicle. The apprentices at the academy also assist the instructors at the range and become familiarized with the standard-issue duty weapon.

An apprentice participating in fleet operation and logistics becomes skilled at operating a variety of police vehicles and seized automobiles, and the department saves hundreds of hours on logistics. At the evidence and warrant desk, apprentices handle and label evidence for criminal cases, gaining experience using and testifying on the chain of custody (an important legal procedure practiced by every officer, tracking the history of evidence as it changes hands through the legal system). Apprentices at the court's police liaison learn the basics of procedural criminal law and testifying in court cases. They also learn about proper evidence gathering techniques, preventing improper investigation and Fourth Amendment violations, and reducing the likelihood of improper or illegal evidence collection by the apprentice later in their career. Apprentices are entirely responsible for running the department's fingerprinting desk, gaining proficiency in one of the most important skills needed in arrests and criminal investigation: fingerprinting. Apprentices in the patrol bureau ride along during patrol shifts, helping officers during traffic stops, routine calls for service, and emergency call response. Apprentices, while they do not have vested police powers for arrest or detainment, do observe arrests and investigations, and testify in court when needed. Apprentices for police departments also fill a niche for enforcing youth laws, assisting with alcohol sales and other age compliance laws during low-stakes plainclothes stings.

BOX 1

Duties of a Police Apprentice: How Fairfax County Upskills Their Apprentices:

How does Fairfax County Police Department prepare their apprentices for the rigors of police work, while benefitting from the work of the apprentices? The department exposes cadets to various facets of police work and procedural policy and benefits from cadets' labor from the day they first begin. Just look at the job description for an apprentice!

The assigned duties of a police apprentice⁵ involve both learning and productive work:

- Participates in on-the-job training in the areas of traffic control, investigations, crime prevention, communications, first aid and crime scene investigation procedures.
- Takes courses in how to take fingerprints and process film.
- Participates in emergency vehicle operations training and firearm familiarization courses.
- Assists in inventory control as well as receiving/issuing supplies.
- Assists in inventorying and handling seized and stolen property, which will be used as evidence in court.
- Performs various administrative functions.

Overall, the apprentices fill many needs for a department that would otherwise require police officers, a costly proposition when patrol squads are short staffed, while learning critical, specific skills directly relevant to their future as law enforcement officers. Apprentices are assessed on their competence on a variety of skills by a direct supervisor, by those managing police department

administrative tasks, and by the officer in charge of the program. After their three years as apprentices, completers who perform well in their apprenticeship receive offers to become full-time police officers.

In the co-author's experience, the apprentices operated in a squad of 10, with each assigned to various positions throughout the department, sometimes in pairs for assignments like fleet logistics. The squad functioned as a social fabric for apprentices, filling the need for a cohort of people alike in age and goals. Members of the cohort formed close bonds that lasted well beyond their time as an apprentice. Because the apprentices rotated around the department, they came in contact with a large cadre of officers and became well connected in the law enforcement network.

By assigning administrative and logistic functions to cadets, police departments can eliminate the opportunity cost of pulling an officer from "the street" to perform such tasks, and the cadets gain proficiency with the myriad skills required in law enforcement work. The appendix provides a detailed list of functions that police apprentices perform that would otherwise require civilian employees or police officers to perform.

Productive Work Makes Apprenticeships Cost-Effective

All apprenticeships involve productive work. Police apprenticeships follow this model, with apprentices filling police department needs outside of the usual patrol and call response they are known for. In 2022, administrative and support work cost the Fairfax County police department roughly \$60,000,000.⁶ The figure includes several costs such as that of operating a police academy and salary outlays for 120 of the 322 civilians (non-police) working for the department. In 2022, the department had more than 322 positions for civilians. On principle, many of these positions can be either supplemented or fully replaced with the work of apprentices (or "cadets," in the language of the Fairfax department).

Fingerprinting, for instance, is a procedure used by most police departments in the US, particularly for background investigations, or for detainees at jails on intake. In the co-author's experience at Fairfax County, cadets can entirely supplant the civilians that would otherwise staff the public fingerprinting desk. In the process of doing so, apprentices learn the critical process of taking fingerprints with biometric and ink methods; something any officer will do countless times during their career.

The productive work done by apprentices across the department reduces costs in several cost centers. Fairfax (and other police departments) hire technicians to maintain and handle extensive catalogues of evidence, composing thousands of cases. Apprentices assist here, handling, packaging, and releasing evidence. The co-author spent time at the courthouse, at the police liaison, learning courtroom procedures for police, reviewing reports, and testifying. Apprentices often supplant functions of police officers. For example, apprentices run information and packages between police stations in Fairfax, a task otherwise performed by an officer. Thus, work by apprentices frees time for officers who can thereby perform additional enforcement and deterrence work for the county.

Apprentices assist (and observe) at the department's police academy. There are cars to move, cone courses to set, and practical tests that need an extra hand. The co-author learned rudimentary first aid simply from sitting in on classes at the academy while working there. This model can be standardized and extended to new apprentices as a formal way to supplement their on-the-job training, as related technical instruction. Apprentices staff the quartermaster to help with inventory, resource, and uniform management, move vehicles for fleet logistics, maintain evidence catalogues, and help maintain and operate a helicopter. These are all tasks that would otherwise be performed by officers or civilian personnel, both of whom are costlier than apprentices. It is costly in both hourly terms and opportunity cost to remove an officer from the street to do tasks a cadet could perform. Assigning cadets productive work tasks both reduces costs for the department and gives the cadet meaningful work directly relevant to their career as a police officer.

While the police academy provides some of the required classroom instruction, the related technical instruction or RTI can take place through CTE courses in high school and community colleges, reducing costs for police departments. Here, students who become apprentices learn about constitutional rights, types of crimes, how trials work, radio procedures, and the basic frameworks for responding to incoming calls for police service. Schools may refer apprentices to active shooter courses so that they gain expertise in active shooter response.

Not only do apprenticeship programs build the training of police officers, but they can be quite cost-effective, since apprentice salaries cost far less than the salaries of police officers or the civilian labor the department otherwise employs. A detailed analysis of the benefits and costs of the apprenticeship model for police departments is beyond the scope of this study. However, table 2 offers illustrative estimates based on the program in Fairfax County, which recruits and trains up to 100 new officers per year. Because of the duration of the apprenticeship and state laws requiring police officers to be at least 21, recruitment and training would begin three years prior to the hiring of police officers into permanent positions. Apprenticeship completers would become officers without having to attend the police academy.

The assumptions used for table 2 include the following:

1. On average, civilian personnel at the department earn \$30 per hour and have benefit costs of 35 percent of their salary. Thus, the cost is \$84,280 for 2080 hours per year.
2. Recruitment and screening costs, including bonuses, of each police officer under the academy model averages \$50,000. These costs are approximately \$15,000 less for apprentices coming directly out of high school because of the shorter duration of background checks and the ready pool of young applicants from CTE classes.
3. The police recruits earn \$30 per hour plus benefits during the police academy period. The duration of the academy is 840 hours. Police officers earn \$33 per hour plus benefits after the academy training. The total costs of a recruit during the academy period amount to \$34,020. For the 400 hours of initial on-the-job training, police officers receive \$17,820.

4. The costs of operating the academy and related training are \$40,000 per recruit. Because apprentices learn some criminal justice material in high school, the apprenticeship does not have to bear the full cost of related training instruction (RTI).
5. Apprentices learn some of the required theory in high school CTE criminal justice classes for which departments pay none of the costs. About \$10,000 per year is spent on necessary instruction in two-year colleges, many of which already operate as police academies.
6. Police apprentices earn \$16 per hour in the first year, \$17 per hour in the second year, and \$19 per hour in the third year. Fringe benefits are estimated at 25 percent for apprentices. For the three years of the apprenticeship, the salary costs are \$135,200 in total.
7. Apprentices spend three-quarters of their time engaging in administrative and clerical work which the police department would otherwise need to pay another worker to perform. Some of the work (1,248 hours) replaces tasks normally undertaken by civilians and 312 hours replaces tasks normally undertaken by police officers. Most of this time involves learning a variety of police tasks on the job.
8. During these hours, apprentices average 80 percent of the productivity of civilian employees and 75 percent of the productivity of police officers for the tasks apprentices undertake. Replacing the civilian employees yields a benefit of \$50,544 per year or \$151,632 for three years. Replacing police labor saves \$13,900 per year, or \$41,700 for three years.

TABLE 2

Illustrative Net Costs of the Academy and Apprenticeship Models of Police Recruitment and Training

	Net Costs per Officer for Hiring and Training (In Dollars)	
	Academy model	Apprentice model
Recruitment, hiring, and screening costs	50,000	15,000
Police compensation during six-month academy	34,020	
Salaries of apprentices for three years		135,200
Police academy costs	40,000	
Costs of off-job learning		30,000
Value of administrative work by apprentices		-151,632
Value of apprentice work of police functions		-41,700
Police wages net of productivity, initial OJT	17,820	
Total net costs	124,020	-13,132

These figures indicate police departments could save large amounts by shifting from the academy model to the apprenticeship approach to recruiting and training police officers. For 100 officers, instead of spending \$124 million, the departments could gain about \$13 million. Although the assumptions underlying the table might vary, the results are likely to be robust regarding recruitment, training, and substituting labor with police apprentices.

Moreover, these figures may understate the value of the apprentice model to departments. The turnover of apprentice-trained police officers is likely lower than that of academy-trained officers. Apprentices will have far more field experience in a broader range of encounters than police trained through the academy with only 400 hours of on-the-job training. The apprenticeship model is likely to improve the screening of individuals before they are hired as officers, since apprentices are observed over a span of three years while academy-trained officers are observed for only a few months. Finally, under the apprentice model, new police officers are far more likely to be drawn from the local community and thus lead to improved police-community relations.

Takeaways for Research and Policy

The implications for practitioners are clear: police departments could reduce costs by implementing effective and practical apprenticeship programs that better prepare officers for the complexities of policing. Youth apprenticeship can reduce the barrier to a career in policing for nontraditional applicants, while the duration of the apprenticeship helps select against those who are not a good fit for policing or may do harm in the role. Policy professionals and practitioners can impact departments through technical assistance, outreach, funding incentives, and through providing other resources to ease the transition to the apprenticeship model. Policymakers can consider legislation to formalize certification by licensing apprentices who complete their apprenticeships as state-certified police officers, and direct funding to departments that are moving toward a long-form apprentice training program. Policy practitioners can share standardized formats for related technical instruction as well as work process schedules that provide a clear path through an apprenticeship program.

Researchers should direct focus to this area of the literature, which is scant. To the best of our knowledge, there exist no causal (or even associative) inference studies assessing the quantitative impact of the apprenticeship model for policing; criminologists, economists, and political scientists are needed to model and assess the impacts of alternate training regimens. Researchers can assess the long-term causal effects of police apprenticeship by studying departments in transition and identify effective strategies for improving department diversity and officer performance.

Appendix: Job Tasks Performed by Apprentices

Operations

- Fleet logistics
 - Take vehicles in for service. Maintain, wash, clean fleet cars. Shuffle vehicles between administrative buildings and duty stations. Move vehicles as needed by the patrol bureau.
 - Move vehicles for special assignments; e.g., position squad cars for ceremonies, parades, events.
 - Operate seized and unmarked vehicles as necessary to move between duty assignments and as needed by the department.
- Resource management
 - Run mail. Transport evidence, correspondence, packages, and resources between county locations as needed. “Gopher” work; bring what is needed at the time it is needed.
- Administrative/clerical work
 - Censor releases of case information as per the Freedom of Information Act.
 - File vehicle maintenance records.
 - Operate police databases to log interactions; e.g., fingerprinting, handling evidence.
 - Operate police resource management enterprise–resource–planning databases to maintain upkeep of vehicles.
- Quartermaster’s desk
 - Act as quartermaster.
 - Distribute uniforms, equipment.
 - Catalogue, clean, and take inventory of store equipment, uniforms, regalia.
 - Run aforementioned supplies to necessary locations as appropriate.
- Fingerprinting desk
 - Apprentices can staff the department’s fingerprinting service.
 - Learn and use biometric, ink methods for fingerprinting civilians who need fingerprints for background checks.
- Training/academy
 - Function as an “extra pair of hands” for in-service (or in-house academy) training.
 - Assist with in-service training, practical/scenario training, upkeep of training facilities.
 - Assist at emergency vehicle operations center training, firearm in-service training, maintain equipment.
- Evidence/warrant desk
 - Function as an evidence technician. Package, handle, and testify on evidence as needed, catalogue and collect evidence from officers to store per department procedures.
 - Assist at warrant/evidence desk, collect requests from citizens for evidence pickup, assist with warrant arrests and courthouse relations.
 - Participate as police liaison on evidence, testimony scheduling for officers; run evidence to/from court as needed from evidence lockup.
 - Participate in chain of custody.

Patrol

- Duty station Police Citizen Aide
 - Can function as police–citizen aide to interface with public in a safe way as representative of duty station.

- Field in-person requests for police service, navigate citizens to appropriate services or connect with officers as needed.
- Conduct basic warrant/background lookups using duty station computer/radio on citizen requests.
- Participate in day-to-day station operations and chores, sort mail to officers, stay up-to-date on court requests, sit in on roll-call, keep up to date on duty reports.
- Maintain station equipment.
- Patrol
 - Ride-along with field training-certified, experienced officers to act as extra pair of hands.
 - Take notes and write reports on experiences appropriately.
 - Conduct pre-shift checks on police vehicles and take appropriate documentation.
 - Observe and assist with calls for service, learn appropriate response to citizen requests for service.
 - **Enforce alcohol/marijuana age compliance laws.** In plainclothes, purchase alcohol from stores with liquor licenses, testify in court on violations committed by shopkeepers selling to apprentices.

Investigation/Special Assignment

- Helicopter
 - Clean dust, debris off of police helicopter.
 - Maintain helicopter medical equipment; inventory, cleaning, upkeep, procurement.
 - Assist with operation of camera, radio while helicopter is in flight.
 - Participate in medevac training as a practice victim.
 - Assist in-house mechanic with maintenance, upkeep, operations-related tasks.
- Investigations (major crimes, criminal investigation service, station-level detectives)
 - Assist with admin/clerical tasks related to criminal investigations.
 - Assist with forensic collection of evidence; transport and take inventory of evidence collected.
 - Transcribe jail calls, listen for information of note to investigators.
 - Assist with interview logistics.
 - Participate in interviews, fieldwork.
- Crime analysis
- Dispatch
 - Directly observe and take notes on call-taking.
 - Assist with dispatching police units as directed by dispatcher.
 - Learn geography of police jurisdiction, methods and procedures for dispatching units.

Notes

¹ Robert Klemko, "Police Agencies Are Desperate to Hire. But They Say Few Want the Job," *Washington Post*, May 27, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/05/27/police-vacancies-hiring-recruiting-reform>.

² "Police Officer Demographics and Statistics in the US," Zippia: The Career Expert, accessed on March 12, 2024, <https://www.zippia.com/police-officer-jobs/demographics>.

³ "Fast Facts: Time to Degree." National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, accessed on March 27, 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=569>.

- ⁴ “Fairfax County Career Pages: Police Cadet,” Governmentjobs.com, accessed January 16, 2023, <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/fairfaxcounty/jobs/3852479/police-cadet>.
- ⁵ “FY 2022 Fairfax County Adopted Budget Plan (Vol. 1) – 188: Police Department,” Fairfax County Department of Management and Budget, accessed on March 27, 2024, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/sites/budget/files/assets/documents/fy2022/adopted/volume1/90.pdf>

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Robert Lerman is an Institute fellow in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population at the Urban Institute as well as emeritus professor of economics at American University and a research fellow at IZA in Bonn, Germany. A leading expert on apprenticeship, he co-founded Apprenticeships for America and serves as Chair of the Board. His current research focus is on skills, employer training, apprenticeship programs in the United States and abroad, and housing policies. Lerman earned his AB at Brandeis University and his PhD in economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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