

HPD Recruiting & HR Practices Presentation Q&A Wrap-Up

Please see the following responses to public questions during the HPCAC Public Meeting on Jan. 11, 2022

Q: When HPD recruits police officers from outside Huntsville (lateral transfers), how does HPD vet the candidate for toxic behaviors?

A: The Huntsville Police Department reviews applicants by through background investigations, polygraph examinations, reference checks, interview panels and psychological testing. In addition to these measures for lateral transfer applicants, their law enforcement work history and workforce behavior is reviewed.

Q: Do other police departments put a “don’t hire tag” on officers they fire?

A: The Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (APOSTC) requires law enforcement agencies notify them within 10 days of an officer’s termination. Based on the reason for termination, APOSTC determines whether the officer can be hired by another agency. The State of Alabama of Alabama passed a law in July 2021 that requires the creation of a statewide database to track disciplinary actions against police officers. This database must be in place by October 1, 2023.

Q: Are lateral transfers subjected to the same vetting process as a new recruit?

A: Yes, refer to question one for details.

Q: What background information is acquired on officers transferring into HPD?

A: We conduct a full background report. For laterals, this includes a thorough review of the candidate’s employee files from police agencies where the applicant worked as an officer.

Q: Does HPD have, or can it produce a graphic that shows the diversity make-up of HPD across gender, race/ethnicity, college graduates, years of police experience?

A: Huntsville Police track this data and it is regularly provided in public reports.

Q: Why is college education preferred but not required?

A: Research has shown that college-educated police officers are well-rounded. They possess enhanced writing, critical thinking, communication and ethical decision-making skills, are less likely to shoot their guns, less likely to use force, have fewer citizen complaints and use creative thinking and problem-solving skills in community policing. While college education is decidedly a plus for officers, there are many excellent candidates who have not had the opportunity to attend college. For these officers, HPD encourages continuing education to earn a college degree. Any applicants without a college degree who have not been previously certified are required to take the ACT WorkKeys Assessment Basic Abilities Test (BAT) and receive a passing score.

Q: Is there a financial aid program available to help officers earn a college degree?

A: The department has worked with several colleges to establish a scholarship fund for officers who wish to attend college.

Q: Are there non-financial incentives for officers to earn a college degree?

A: For an officer to promote to the rank of lieutenant, they are required to have a college degree.

Q: Request greater understanding of HPD's continuing education program. How is it structured?

A: The State of Alabama requires officers to complete 12-hours of continuing education each year. Huntsville Police Officers receive at least 24 hours of in-service training every year, but many officers complete more than 40-hours per year. All specialized units have in-service training weekly, bi-weekly or monthly, equating to up to 384 hours of additional training each year. Courses offered are on a variety of topics including defensive tactics, peer support, crisis intervention training and implicit bias.

Q: How are the 40-hours of continuing education standardized?

A: The education requirements are outlined by APOSTC and tracked; however, the Huntsville Police Department provides training above and beyond the requirement. This training is determined on a year by year basis in regard to need. As an example, over the course of the last two years, HPD has required bias and decision-making training of its officers, even though it was not required by the State of Alabama.

Q: How is continuing education incentivized?

A: Continuing education is a requirement for all police officers in the State of Alabama; however, HPD requires more than what is required. Officers are incentivized to take more training than required by the department because additional training is part of their assessment for promotion and special assignments.

Q: The presentation mentioned that psychological testing is performed on prospective recruits by the State of Alabama. Is testing administered by a third-party contractor?

A: Yes, the Huntsville Police Department is committed to having the finest men and women join our force. The Department requires all applicants to undergo a written psychological exam and requires applicants who pass the written element to also undergo an oral psychological exam with a doctor and trained professional. HPD strives to have the most qualified and suitable candidates in our Academy, and the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Commission is working to ensure this testing is standard in departments throughout the state

Q: Does the testing administrator / entity determine what questions are asked, or does the State dictate what is asked?

A: The State determines a standardized test and mandates all officers receive the same test to meet their requirements.

Q: What are the certification credentials of the testing administrator/entity?

A: The City of Huntsville Human Resources contracts this service through approved state testing sites.

Q: How do you assess for emotional intelligence?

A: Through the use of oral interview boards, psychological testing and polygraph tests.

Q: Is this a part of the psychological testing?

A: Yes.

Q: Does HPD perform psychological testing during police academy training to assess changes in psychological states / mental fitness?

A: Candidates are continuously evaluated during the Police Academy to assess their ability to maintain their composure under stress. This is in addition to the "pre-hire" psychological testing required of all police recruits before beginning the Police Academy

Q: What does HPD do to re-evaluate an officer's mental health throughout their career?

A: We have a peer support program, a counselor on contract, observation and interactions with peers and supervisors, and a robust Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provided by the City.

Q: What does HPD do to help officers combat stress and maintain good mental health?

A: In addition to the answer above, classes are given on stress management and physical and mental resiliency.

Q: What does HPD do to encourage officers to interact with the precinct they serve?

A: Each precinct participates in a variety of activities specific to the neighborhoods they patrol and serve. Community events, fundraising, and Community Watch meetings are among the many programs offered by police. Community policing, where specific officers work and patrol the same areas every day, is another tool police employ to build stronger bonds with residents.

Q: What does HPD do to retain high-quality officers?

A: Huntsville Police salaries and benefits are competitive in our area. There are more opportunities for advancement at HPD than other departments in the region. The Huntsville Police Department strives for a culture of empathy and professionalism that makes high-quality officers feel valued.

Q: How does HPD's training standards compare to major cities of similar size outside of Alabama?

A: HPD requires more training and higher scores than other police departments in Alabama and across the nation. The department operates its own 19-week academy for cadets before they start field training which is five weeks longer than what is required by the Alabama Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (APOSTC). HPD requires an 80% pass rate for exams and qualifying tests to become an officer, the state only requires a 70% pass rate for these exams and qualifying tests.

Q: How is paid v. unpaid administrative leave determined with respect to officer discipline?

A: Administrative leave is determined by the City of Huntsville Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual, which applies equally to all City employees in any position or department.

Q: What standard or policy is applied based on severity of offense?

A: Employees are disciplined in accordance to the City of Huntsville Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual.

Q: How does HPD reinforce what was learned during academy training during the first few years on duty? How do you mitigate a "Training Day" (the movie) scenario?

A: All HPD Officers receive in-service training each year, as discussed above. The department also performs continuous evaluation, and monitoring of employees. The Huntsville Police Department works to maintain a culture of empathy and professionalism.

Q: What can HPCAC do to help support HPD's FTO program?

A: The field training program is a national program designed to help graduates of the Police Academy learn how to apply what they have learned in the Academy in the real world. As each member of the HPCAC becomes more familiar with HPD's day to day operations, we welcome their suggestions on how to improve the program.

Q: What training do HPD officers receive on U-VISAs (crime victim VISAs)?

A: The Huntsville Police Department Written Directive 401.28 explains the policy with U-Visa Certification. Any request to issue a U-VISA Certification is handled by the Administrative Services Commander on behalf of the Chief of Police. It should be noted, HPD treats all people the same regardless of their citizenship status. Victims of any crime are encouraged to report crimes to police.