Background

The City of Syracuse has a demographic profile similar to many mid-size cities. According to the U.S. Census the overall population is 142,327 and the racial demographics are as follows: 30 % African American, 10 % Latinos, 6.5% Asian, and 55% White. Over 80% of the Syracuse residents that are 25 years of age or older are reported to have at least a high school education. However, Syracuse has the nation's highest rate of concentrated poverty with 31% of the residents and roughly half of the children experiencing poverty.

The Syracuse Police Department (SPD) has an active force of 396 members. Currently, 89% of the SPD officers are White which is in stark contrast to the racial make-up of the City of Syracuse.[i] There is also a disparity amongst genders with women only making up 12% of the population (K. Buckner, personal communication, Dec 1, 2020).

A multipronged approach to recruitment should be taken to address the identified gaps in diversity.

Barriers to Diversity:

On par with national trends regarding barriers to recruiting a diverse police force SPD faces the following recruitment challenges:

1. A lack of awareness of employment opportunities within the police department
2. A lack of awareness of the benefits of joining the Syracuse Police department
3. Mistrust within the minority community towards the police department
4. Competition for qualified candidates
5. Personnel Regulations

Recommendations:

Increasing awareness about opportunities and benefits of joining the Syracuse Police department

A digital campaign strategy should be implemented to spread awareness of about the benefits of joining the Syracuse Police department and highlighting employment opportunities with the department. This can be best achieved by working closely with the marketing department to create a tailor communication plan that captures the target audience attention while simultaneously telling the story of the police department.

Suggested platform to use as the primary form of communication for the digital campaign strategy is the SPD Facebook page because the Facebook has a wider reach with 28,442 followers in comparison to the Instagram page with 4,021 followers, and Twitter with 2,739.

In addition to the digital campaign strategy strong partnerships with local educational institutions such Onondaga Community College, Lemoyne College, Syracuse University, and surrounding area colleges should be created. These partnerships could aid tremendously in the dissemination of information about the department and help circumvent negative stereotypes about police officers.

Building Trust in the Community:

Many communities have deployed a strong community engagement strategy to help with identifying and lowering barriers to recruitment in minorities' communities. The most critical component of an engagement strategy is trust building. In effort to foster better community relations content should be regularly generated that focus on police community relations and provide citizens the opportunity learn about engagement such as ride along and police sponsored community events. Additionally, continuing and expanding existing opportunities for community engagement such as Shop with A Cop, *Coffee with A Cop,* community give aways. The public should be informed on how to participate in each of these opportunities for the purpose of relationship cultivation.

Research shows that engaging community residents can help lower obstacles to recruitment by creating champions that can assist with dismantling stereotypes and serve as resource for interested candidates to help usher them through the process. [ii]Community focus groups could serve as a critical source of identifying barriers such as negative perceptions, cumbersome processes, misinformation about the recruitment process, and receive suggestions on how to overcome the identified barriers. Furthermore, the community focus groups should also be used as an opportunity to provide helpful information about the department and the recruitment process in an open and transparent manner.

Create a hiring committee that is comprised of officers and community members who are committed to advancing diversity and inclusion in the SPD. This will create community ambassadors who reassure the potential applicants that process is fair and transparent. Furthermore, these community members can also serve as a "mentor" to recruits through the entire process of recruitment and hire.

Lastly, the consent decree should be kept in place because it serves the dual purpose of demonstrating the department ongoing commitment to create and maintain a diverse workforce and provides the community an additional form of recourse if diversity measures are not met.

Personnel Regulations and Addressing Competition for Qualified Applicants

A detailed analysis of existing personnel practices to assess if the process creates unnecessary burden on the applicant is critical to reducing and/or removing barriers to hire. This analysis should be use an equity lens to critically go through each step of the hiring process to check for bias. The existing body of research on recruiting for diversity shows that screening tools such as background checks, fitness, and cognitive test have disparate impacts on underrepresented communities[iii]. This work should be done with a third party consultant.

If possible collaborate with other police department to reduce competition for qualified applicants. Creating communication channels between neighboring police departments and hosting joint employment affairs are some tentative examples that may create reduce competition.

Hire a full time employee for recruitment efforts: Although the recruitment process **should not** solely fall on person there should be a person who is the designated recruiter. This person should be provided resources such as training and best practice models for recruitment in addition to the full commitment of the department to advance diversity goals. If possible make this a civilian position (CSEA).

The overall goal of recruitment should be a department that reflects diversity not only in the terms of race and gender but also age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious practices etc.

[i] New York State. (2020) *Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative*
[ii] COPS/IACP Leadership Project. (2009) *Law Enforcement Recruitment*
https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/RecruitmentToolkit.pdf
[iii] New York State. (2020) *Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative*