

# Departments pay a steep price for inefficiency – but it's not what you think

Becoming a game-changer in police hiring requires thinking outside the box

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For most organizations, accidentally hiring someone who doesn't perfectly fit their role is an unfortunate fact of life. It's a mistake that companies don't want to make often, since firing and rehiring can be costly. Rarely do firms worry about one bad apple spoiling the lot, but it's a different story for law enforcement agencies. [There's so much at stake](#) when just one problem-prone officer is hired. The misconduct of just a single officer can erode public trust or even bring tremendous liability to the agency.



Paper-based record keeping can be hard to follow, plus it's difficult to pinpoint areas where the process could be improved. (Image/Stock)

Measuring the costs of a bad cop can be a bit tricky, since you're not going to get a bill for your hiring mistakes. But cases that drew higher public scrutiny, like the [re-hiring of a troubled officer in Oregon](#), show how lapses in law enforcement hiring practices can trigger a domino effect of negative consequences and tremendous costs.

So what could police departments do to make smarter hiring decisions as they endeavor to [recruit and retain top talent](#)?

According to retired Lieutenant Greg Taylor, who for years has been a background investigator and project manager for the Oklahoma City Police Department, one critical step toward tackling this question is to innovate hiring practices to improve efficiency.

Ignoring recruitment challenges in your department today can lead to bigger problems in the future and can cost you in several ways. Here's how:

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## FOR CITY MANAGERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS: COSTS GO BEYOND POLICE PAYOUTS

Joey Reynolds, the former police chief of Bluffton, South Carolina and the 2017 president of the FBI National Academy Associates, said city managers and council members should think proactively on how to avoid costly lawsuits against police personnel.

Take Chicago for instance, where more than half a [billion dollars \(approximately \\$662 million\)](#) was spent between 2004 and 2014 on legal costs for police misconduct cases.

"Cities should rein in the practices that lead to these settlements and the erosion of public trust that follows incidents both inside and outside of the public glare," said Reynolds.

The first step agencies should take is to scrutinize current recruitment practices and policies.

That's exactly what led Justin Biedinger, a former officer of 13 years at the Stockton Police Department and a former background investigator, to develop [Guardian Alliance Technologies](#), which offers a standardized background investigations platform designed to overcome the unique challenges of law enforcement agencies.

"The lack of process transparency is one of the biggest pain points for departments in the hiring process," said Biedinger, the president and founder of Guardian Alliance Technologies.

Because many departments rely on paper records and snail mail to verify the background of candidates, agencies are between a rock and a hard spot. Paper-based record keeping can be hard to follow, plus it's difficult to pinpoint areas where the process could be improved. On top of this, it often takes up to several months to complete the required screenings, yet alone fill vacant positions.

## FOR POLICE CHIEFS: INEFFICIENT HIRING PROCESSES HINDER RECRUITMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

When Mason City police chief Jeff Brinkley started his position, he was determined to improve hiring practices within his agency in Iowa. After attending a training session on better recruitment practices, he learned about [Guardian Alliance Technologies](#) and tried a test-run of the platform in his department.

Prior to using a web-based system, the Mason City Police Department relied on paper records and snail mail to process background investigations. Not only did that saddle the department with the typical inefficiencies associated with a paper-based workflow, but it also accrued ongoing costs for the agency. Filing, storing and accessing paper documents for years after investigations are complete can become very costly (Imagine thousands of pages of documents in storage), and it's incredibly time-consuming for officers to retrieve and make the most out of paper records.

"In the past, it was difficult to hold people accountable and make decisions surrounding delayed background investigations, but with the Guardian system, the entire process is transparent and we've cut down our candidate processing time from two months to just two to four weeks," said Brinkley.

By logging into Guardian Alliance Technologies' platform, police supervisors can easily view investigator workload, monitor the progress of investigations, easily manage officer workload for investigations, add documents, control user settings and pull comprehensive reports on active and completed investigations.

In the Story County Sheriff's Office in Nevada, Iowa, Captain Barry Thomas and his team also faced similar challenges by having a paper-based background investigations process.

The biggest hidden cost for police chiefs, according to Thomas, is that when agencies fail to innovate their hiring processes they lose the opportunity to attract and retain top law enforcement talent.

"What we're seeing now in the profession is that you can't have hurdles in place that are going to slow you down from hiring the right candidate," said Thomas, who also served as the 2016 president of the [FBI National Academy Associates](#). "If you continue recruiting the old way you're going to lose the best candidates and our profession simply cannot afford this right now."

Thomas added that using Guardian Alliance Technologies' platform, which puts all of the data and information officers need in one secure place, has not only optimized the workflow of his investigators, but has also attracted younger applicants, who generally expect the hiring process to be digital.

"By going digital you're sending these young candidates a message that your department is efficient and progressive," said Thomas.

## FOR BACKGROUND INVESTIGATORS: IT'S ABOUT WORKING SMARTER

For background investigators like Taylor, handling a large volume of background investigations used to be overwhelming, since everything was on paper.

"Background investigations kept on paper are time-consuming in both the physical handling of the paper, and in the significant amount of data on each page that needs to be recorded, documented and evaluated easily," he said.

That explains why the process could take up to several months. There's only so many background investigators for each department, and processing thousands of applications puts a heavy burden on your investigators.

But when the Oklahoma City Police Department started using Guardian Alliance Technologies' platform, the short-term and long-term issues related to recruiting, conducting background investigations and hiring were resolved because of the consistent and systematic process the platform introduced, according to Taylor.

By using the platform, investigators can contact all of an applicant's employers and references with the click of a button, automatically store all contact correspondence for neighborhood checks, contact other law enforcement agencies using securely stored data, track completed areas of investigation and easily pull final investigation reports without having to draft them from scratch.

"The biggest positive change that Guardian Alliance Technologies brought to our department was the process efficiency that allowed us to automate many of the labor-intensive tasks like sending out a request for more information or asking for references," said Taylor. "With this new process we're now on track to process approximately 2,300 to 2,500 applications this year."

By utilizing technological tools that promote efficiency and transparency, your department can see advantageous returns. When you add up all of the cost savings that better law enforcement hiring processes can provide, the answer is clear: it's worth the value it provides.

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