



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE SPECIAL REPORT

# WOMEN IN POLICING: BREAKING BARRIERS AND BLAZING A PATH

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This report was prepared by Rianna P. Starheim, a writer with a federal contractor, on assignment at the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.



# Executive Summary

Despite efforts to increase representation, the percentage of women in law enforcement<sup>1</sup> has remained relatively stagnant for the past few decades. Women constitute less than 13% of total officers and a much smaller proportion of leadership positions.<sup>2</sup> There is limited empirical research on how to increase the number of women in policing, improve the recruitment of outstanding women, and increase the retention and promotion of exceptional women officers. There is also insufficient research for understanding the unique challenges that women officers face and how best to mitigate or overcome these challenges.

On Dec. 3-4, 2018, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) hosted the Research Summit on Women in Policing at our Washington, D.C., headquarters. Nearly 100 attendees participated, including sworn and civilian law enforcement officers from the United States and abroad, leading policing researchers, representatives from professional organizations and foundations, and federal partners. The goal of the summit was to understand the current state of research relevant to women in American policing, and to generate a research agenda of questions that women leaders in the field have identified as priorities in moving the profession forward toward parity.

Meeting attendees developed a shared definition of parity in policing for the purpose of this discussion: “When fair and equal access is equivalent to women’s propensity.”

As the research arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, NIJ uses research to understand and advance criminal and juvenile justice issues. NIJ believes that listening to and working with the dedicated individuals working on the front lines is the only way to effectively understand both the field’s needs and what research is most relevant to addressing them. Based on conversations at NIJ’s Research Summit on Women in Policing, this report documents the current state of research on women in policing across the areas of culture, performance, recruitment and retention, and promotion. It also sets out the agenda of research questions that attendees collectively prioritized.

This report is only a starting point. Implementing this research agenda and moving toward equality and equity for all women working in policing will take great effort, dedication, partnerships, and time.

Attendees put forward the following key questions in a research agenda to better understand the state of women in American policing and improve the representation and experiences of women in the field. These themes are not in priority order; rather, they reflect the order of discussion in the summit.

### **THEME 1: CHARTING A COURSE**

- How have the representation and experiences of women in policing changed in the past 30 years?
- What barriers do women in policing face? How do these barriers compare to barriers women face in other professions?
- What strategies create sustained cultural changes that lead to improvements in the representation and experiences of women in policing?
- How can law enforcement agencies — in partnership with other organizations — improve data collection and measures to better inform efforts to improve the representation and experiences of women in policing?
- What practices in other industries are promising for improving the representation and experiences of women in law enforcement?
- What is the relationship between race, ethnicity, and gender in these issues? Between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender? What are the specific experiences of officers who are women of color, and how does the intersection of gender and race affect the challenges women of color face in this occupation?
- How can we increase diversity in policing?
- What are men's perspectives on women in policing?
- What is the most effective business case for advancing women in policing?

- What role can/do men play in improving the representation and experiences of women in policing?

### **THEME 2: CULTURE**

- What negative aspects of policing cultures need to change for women officers to be better integrated into and integral to departments?
- What makes a law enforcement environment toxic for women practitioners?
- What are women police officers' perceptions and experiences of harassment in the workplace? What are effective interventions to reduce the prevalence of harassment?
- How can law enforcement academies better serve women?
- What is the impact of language in shifting or maintaining the status quo of how women are treated in law enforcement?
- How can we foster the courage to be accountable for improving the representation and experiences of women in policing?
- What are the experiences of women working in police departments as civilians and contractors?

### **THEME 3: PERFORMANCE**

- What metrics measure the extent to which women in policing thrive?
- How are women impacting police organizations?
- Do women and men police officers perform differently? If so, how?
- How do women and men police officers compare in regard to officer injuries and fatalities? How do they compare in regard to citizen complaints and use of force?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages associated with assigning women officers across parts of a department versus assigning them together?
- To what extent are women deterred from taking certain assignments and positions? To what extent are the potential contributions of women in certain assignments and positions diminished?
- How does the media portray the performance of women in policing and women in power?
- Do women and men in policing receive equal pay for equal work?
- What experiences and skills are necessary to have a successful policing career, and how can more opportunities be created for women to acquire these critical attributes?
- To what extent do hiring criteria and physical fitness requirements and tests accurately reflect the standards and skills needed to be a successful officer?
- To what extent do agency-led representations of policing (in outward-facing communications such as recruitment videos) accurately reflect actual duties?
- Is rotating shift work necessary? Are other, more family-friendly policies feasible?
- Which U.S. agencies have progressive policies toward parental leave, and what is the impact of these policies?
- What is the impact of postnatal nursing policies?
- How does the availability of quality child care affect women in policing?
- What health issues are specific to women police officers, and how can they be addressed?

#### **THEME 4: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

- Why do women decide not to become police officers? What deters them?
- How can we make the police profession more enticing to women?
- Do departments have different criteria for women and men? Should they?
- How can we make policing a viable and interesting career option for girls, starting at a young age?
- What is the role of a police officer today, and how can we recruit accordingly?
- What is the professional background of people coming into policing, and how does that impact the profession?
- What role can the federal government play in advancing the representation and experiences of women in policing?
- How do women and men police officers compare in regard to physical and mental wellness, stress, and burnout? How does this compare to other professions?
- Why do women leave policing, both during and after the academy? Are retention rates and reasons for leaving similar for men and women? What is the cost to departments when they lose officers, in whom they have invested significant training funds, particularly early in their career?
- What are the characteristics of effective recruitment and retention programs with regard to women officers? What can we learn from departments that are recruiting and retaining women successfully?
- How can departments better help women balance their professional and personal lives?

## **THEME 5: PROMOTION**

- What is the representation of women in law enforcement across ranks?
- Why are women not being promoted nor seeking promotion at the rates one might expect?
- Do women face discrimination in the promotion process?
- How do people view power and ambition in women officers compared to how they view their male counterparts?
- Are women more likely to be promoted into leadership positions in organizations experiencing a legitimacy crisis (i.e., the glass cliff)? If so, what can be done to help these women be more successful leaders?
- What is the impact of women taking women-specific leadership training compared to general policing training?
- What is necessary for women to be at least proportionally represented in leadership?
- What is the impact of an increased number of women in leadership?
- Does mentoring work? What does successful mentoring look like? What are the advantages and disadvantages of women and men mentors?



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# National Institute of Justice Research Summit on Women in Policing

## Introduction

On Dec. 3-4, 2018, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) hosted nearly 100 sworn and civilian law enforcement officers, leading policing researchers, representatives from professional organizations and foundations, and federal partners to discuss the state of research on women in American policing and identify priority questions to form a research agenda on the issue moving forward. This report summarizes the discussions during the summit. These viewpoints do not necessarily reflect the position of NIJ or U.S. Department of Justice.

## Guiding Principles

This report and all of the questions put forward in the research agenda were founded on the following guiding principles.

“Without looking to see how it’s going to change at a structural level, we’re just tinkering around the edges.”

***Moving toward parity must be part of an industry shift.*** Although the research questions and work detailed in this report are an important part of the process, they can only be addressed within a greater industrywide shift. This includes not only improving the representation and experiences of women in law enforcement but also making a larger shift in culture and mindset across the field.

“There’s no typical ‘woman’ coming into a police agency. It’s a spectrum. It’s not necessarily ‘me and how I navigated.’ It’s the aggregate.”

***Women are not a homogenous group.*** As a group, women face disproportionate challenges in policing. However, “women” is an extremely broad category. Data collection should be conducted in a way that allows the analysis of rank, background, economic status, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and many other factors.

***Issues of gender and race are inextricable.***

The intersection of gender and race must be considered whenever discussing or exploring issues relevant to women in policing. Although some questions in this research agenda explicitly address this intersectionality, any research done to explore the experiences of women in policing must be done in a way that allows for analysis across racial and ethnic differences. These analyses must go deeper than a simple comparison between races, to include an in-depth understanding of the different experiences across each racial and ethnic group represented and explore the broader societal and cultural contexts that may drive these differences.

**INTERSECTIONALITY:** Gender and race are inextricable issues. Researchers should design data collection in a way that allows for the delineation of any interdependent factors contributing to discrimination or disadvantage, including race, class, and gender.

***The future must be built on a foundation of data.***

Little is known about certain issues related to women in policing, and rigorous research designs to address these gaps are not always possible. However, NIJ strongly encourages all practitioners and researchers to build the knowledge base on women in policing, using research designs with high internal and external validity, wherever possible.

***The field must be empowered to drive this progress.***

The research questions put forward in this report come directly from practitioners working within the policing field, and from researchers and other individuals working closely with the field. NIJ is strongly committed to supporting field-driven inquiry and change that is directly responsive to the needs of practitioners.

***Partnerships are the most powerful vehicles for progress.***

Moving the needle on women's advancement in policing cannot be accomplished by NIJ, or any other organization, in isolation. Partnerships between law enforcement, foundations, think tanks, academic institutions, trade organizations, and other stakeholders will be vital in improving the representation and experiences of women in policing. All parties have the potential to benefit from such collaborations.

“We can talk about this as a policing problem, but this is an endemic problem in our society.”

***We can learn from other contexts.***

American policing is not the only field in which women face disproportionate adversity. There are numerous lessons to be learned from other contexts, including analogous industries and policing in other countries. Several of the panels in NIJ's summit focused on learning from medicine, technology, and the military as well as policing in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

***Men play a significant role.***

Through this summit, NIJ primarily convened women attendees to define the issues facing women in policing today. NIJ is acutely aware that addressing these challenges is not the sole responsibility of women. All members of the policing community need to be partners in addressing these issues. Men are important change agents in policing, and they will be integral to bringing about an essential shift in policing culture.

***“Success” is a policing field with both equality and equity.***

Although the first steps toward progress are action items — such as policy changes within departments and an increased research focus on women in law enforcement — substantive change will come only with a broad shift in culture and

mindset to equality and equity for women in policing. Attendees agreed that this will be a long path but believe that the shift is eminently possible.

## Research Agenda

The attendees at the Research Summit on Women in Policing identified key research questions, divided into the following themes: Charting a Course, Culture, Performance, Recruitment and Retention, and Promotion. Answers to these research questions will help law enforcement agencies and researchers build a knowledge base to better understand the state of women in policing, the barriers that women in policing face, and effective changes that can be made to improve the representation and experiences of women in policing. The following themes are not in priority order; rather, they reflect the order of discussion at the summit.

### **THEME 1: CHARTING A COURSE**

Women are dramatically underrepresented in American law enforcement, yet there is limited research exploring why this underrepresentation persists. Women make up more than half of the U.S. population but fewer than 13% of law enforcement officers.<sup>3</sup> Large law enforcement agencies, urban areas, and communities with high levels of racial and ethnic diversity tend to have a higher proportion of women officers.<sup>4</sup> Attendees at the NIJ summit noted that when women's representation in law enforcement does not mirror their proportion of the population, trust in law enforcement may be lacking because certain populations are not equitably represented.<sup>5</sup>

#### **How have the representation and experiences of women in policing changed in the past 30 years?**

Although she wasn't able to join in person, the summit included videos of comments from retired Chief Penny Harrington, the

first woman chief of a major American police department — the Portland (Oregon) Police Bureau — and co-founder of the National Center for Women & Policing. When Harrington started as an officer with the Portland Police Bureau in 1964, there were only 12 women in the department. She faced widespread challenges over the course of her career, ranging from blatant harassment and sexism to many iterations of body armor that did not fit or protect women's bodies. Although many of the challenges that Harrington and other women faced still exist, her remarks illuminated some of the progress that women in policing have made over the past few decades. Although attendees were heartened by the progress that has been made, they noted that, in many ways, "we're still fighting the same fight that she fought then."

Although the percentage of women in policing has remained relatively stagnant over the past 30 years, attendees agreed on — and the research literature shows — a trend toward progress on many fronts. Understanding the progress we have made will help identify bright spots, promising practices, areas for continued improvement, and issues and areas that have not progressed over time.



Captain Ivonne Roman, Newark (NJ) Police Department, and Chief Danielle Outlaw, Portland (OR) Police Bureau.

**What barriers do women in policing face? How do these barriers compare to barriers women face in other professions?**

Although attendees were intentional about continuously orienting the conversation toward progress, much of the discussion during the summit was about the barriers that women in policing face. Law enforcement attendees spoke at length about the barriers they had personally faced over the course of their careers, such as the “boys club,” adverse or hostile environments, explicit and subtle harassment, sexism, skewed physical fitness assessments, double standards, and a lack of support and opportunity. Researchers in attendance also spoke about some of the research that has been done on these barriers.

The existing research looks at some promising practices for decreasing the barriers and challenges women in policing face. Attendees noted that these practices should be identified and replicated, along with thorough evaluations of their impact. Attendees pointed to promising practices including mentoring, sponsorship, support networks, and strengthening and enforcing harassment policies. Attendees noted the Women’s Leadership Academy<sup>6</sup> in Newark, New Jersey, as an example of successful support to help women applicants meet physical fitness and academy requirements while building peer networks of women supporting each other’s success.

Attendees noted that many of the barriers to women in policing are not specific to policing; rather, they are reflective of larger societal issues and will take time and commitment to improve. One officer said citizens would ask when the “real police” would arrive when she and her female partner responded to a call. “That’s a broader cultural mindset barrier, not internal to the police department,” she said. One researcher noted, “We can talk about this as a policing problem, but this is an endemic problem in our society.”

**What strategies create sustained cultural changes that lead to improvements in the representation and experiences of women in policing?**

Several agencies across the country have made progress in increasing gender parity, and their experiences offer lessons learned that help other departments. In Portland, Oregon, Harrington filed hundreds of lawsuits and complaints in an effort to initiate change. Several attendees felt that race and gender discrimination lawsuits had historically been the most effective way to change departments. Recommendations from the Christopher Commission, which was founded in Los Angeles after the Rodney King beating in 1991, led to sweeping reforms in the Los Angeles Police Department. When the commission mandated that the department hire 50% women, the representation of women increased dramatically in recruit classes (but only for several years) before again dropping. “I don’t believe that change is going to come from what we do in any individual department,” said one attendee. “Change comes from lawsuits, horrible events, mandates. We’re not going to get this done in departments that don’t want change, and most don’t.” Attendees suggested that change was most likely to occur and be sustained if it was mandated by a mayor, governor, the federal government, or other political drivers outside of police organizations.

Further research should examine what factors have been the drivers of change within the agencies that have made progress on gender parity, considering both internal (e.g., visionary leadership or internally driven policy changes) and external factors (e.g., lawsuits or consent decrees). Participants noted that increases in the representation of women in response to mandates (e.g., consent decrees) appeared to be temporary and that the percentage of women in a department would fall when the mandate was no longer in place. One participant noted the need

for research on the women recruited and hired under these mandates in order to better understand their experiences, particularly once the mandate expires.

**How can law enforcement agencies — in partnership with other organizations — improve data collection and measures to better inform efforts to improve the representation and experiences of women in policing?**

Policy changes and other interventions must be evidence-based. If there is not yet data on an intervention, it should be piloted, measured carefully, and replicated to determine its effectiveness. Although issues affecting women in policing are understudied, one researcher stressed the need to look at the research that has already been conducted on perceptions of policing in general, and to expand these studies into actionable items for officers and departments across the country. Researchers at the summit expressed their belief that police-researcher partnerships could help build the knowledge base. “In policing, we lean too much on ‘I think,’” said one officer. “We need to build an evidence base.”

Attendees noted that researchers and practitioners working to gather data on women in policing must remember that women are not a homogenous group. Data collection must allow for exploration of the intersections of race, gender, and other demographic factors, including rank, background, economic status, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

**What practices in other industries are promising for improving the representation and experiences of women in law enforcement?**

Law enforcement is not the only field affected by a lack of gender parity, nor is the United States the only country. Attendees agreed that progress made

in other fields — such as technology, medicine, and the military — can highlight promising practices for law enforcement. Similarly, American policing can learn lessons from how other countries have addressed a lack of gender parity in their policing systems.

**What is the relationship between race, ethnicity, and gender in these issues? Between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender? What are the specific experiences of officers who are women of color, and how does the intersection of gender and race affect the challenges women of color face in this occupation?**

Some racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately impacted by the challenges that women in policing face. It is critical to better understand this intersectionality in order to make progress. Attendees stressed that intersectionality between race and gender must be an important part of any research on women and policing, and that all research must be conducted in a way that allows for analysis across race and ethnicity. Attendees noted the importance of ensuring that research both captures the specific challenges facing police officers who are women of color and explores promising practices for addressing these challenges at the agency level.

“I think folks are still putting minorities in positions to say they checked the box. We need more of a commitment to diversity in how we look, how we think, what we value as an organization.”

**How can we increase diversity in policing?**

Research shows that diverse workforces are more effective, creative, and resilient than homogenous workforces, and that teams with broad perspectives are better at making decisions and solving problems. Studies also point to the high value of a police force reflective of the diversity in

the community it serves. Given the value of diversity in policing, it is important to study how to better attract and support a diverse workforce.

Attendees, particularly women of color and other minorities, shared their experiences and challenges related to diversity. Several attendees felt that they had been hired or promoted to “check the diversity box,” rather than being based on their merits and qualifications. These attendees stressed the need for departments to go beyond merely increasing the number of minority officers — to also achieve greater diversity in background and thought. A researcher pointed to the Vancouver Police Department in British Columbia as one of the first agencies to commit to diversifying the department to reflect the population. To do this, the department stopped awarding applicants additional points solely for military experience and started recruiting applicants with college degrees and employment experience in diverse fields. Another attendee raised the practice of removing identifying information from applications and solely reviewing candidates with demonstrated experience and skills. One attendee noted that “you can’t be what you can’t see” and stressed the importance of agencies having women and minority leaders for others to look up to. Attendees pointed to the importance of moving beyond desegregation to achieve true integration and inclusion.

“You can’t be what you don’t see.”

### **What are men’s perspectives on women in policing?**

Attendees at NIJ’s research summit represented a broad range of perspectives, but they were almost exclusively women. This was an intentional decision by the organizers of the summit, who felt that women should be empowered to define the issues relevant to their own experiences. Attendees all agreed on the importance of including men in subsequent conversations,

particularly in discussions geared toward generating solutions. They felt strongly that it would be critical to understand men’s perspectives on the issues that women in policing face, and how to improve the representation and experiences of women in policing.

### **What is the most effective business case for advancing women in policing?**

Studies and anecdotal evidence begin to make the case for increasing the number of women in policing. Women have been found to have proportionally fewer use-of-force and citizen complaints, potentially saving departments from costly lawsuits. One attendee stated, “Male officers cost more, with excessive use of force and complaints. I think that’s where we get leverage to change.” Participants discussed the potential impact of tying efforts to advance women in policing to possible cost savings, particularly when working with individuals in leadership positions who have oversight of limited budgets. Studies have also shown women to be more capable in their interactions with diverse communities, although existing evidence in this area is limited and largely outdated. Another attendee raised the question, why would a law enforcement agency want to essentially exclude 50% of its potential workforce and, in so doing, eliminate a pool of qualified and talented workers? Other attendees noted that increased representation of women in policing to better reflect the population at large is a moral imperative, and no further justification should be necessary.

Several attendees noted that, in the interest of making sustainable changes, underrepresentation of women in policing should not be addressed as a gender issue. Rather, the focus should be on transforming policing and policing culture in a way that would naturally lead to an increase in women applicants and retention of women officers. An international officer agreed that her country’s efforts to increase



parity in policing focused on a broad cultural change, which naturally led to an increase in the number of women in the organization, including the transformation of their department from a “police force” to a “police service.”

“We need research on how to empower men to support women in their department.”

### **What role can/do men play in improving the representation and experiences of women in policing?**

Men will be important partners in the movement toward gender parity in policing. “We need research on how to empower men to support women in their department,” said one attendee. Attendees unanimously agreed on the importance of including men in solutions but stressed the importance of engaging men without putting them on the defensive. They suggested that this can be done by placing an emphasis on fixing a flawed system rather than fixing the people within that system. Attendees posited that their male counterparts may be unaware of the extent of the problems women in policing face, making them less inclined to become partners in addressing the issue. Rigorous research can help empirically demonstrate the problem.

Attendees debated various types of mentorship. There was agreement about the value of male mentors in navigating a male-dominated system, as well as male supervisors who had advocated for the professional development and promotion of some of the attendees. Attendees noted that men often hold positions of greater power and influence in policing than women do and are often the necessary messengers to raise awareness and spark action. “It can’t be just us,” said one woman attendee. “We have to have allies that speak on our behalf. We say it, and no one hears. Our male counterparts say it once and everyone says, ‘Oh, what a great idea.’”



(From left to right) Dr. Carolyn Naoroz, Richmond (VA) Police Department; Dr. Cara Rabe-Hemp, Illinois State University; and Deputy Commissioner Tracie Keese, New York City Police Department.

## **THEME 2: CULTURE**

With 18,000 unique police agencies across the country and no nationally centralized policing system, it is difficult to draw universal conclusions about American policing from studies done through one or several agencies. Even so, researchers have attempted to examine the challenges and barriers that women officers face in environments where they are not valued, welcomed, or viewed as equals. Limited qualitative research has highlighted that women officers routinely face sexual harassment and discrimination.<sup>7</sup> Research has also found that certain policies disproportionately dissuade women from becoming law enforcement officers.<sup>8</sup> Although research has begun to examine the law enforcement culture, we need additional research and nationally representative surveys to empirically understand policing culture and its effect on the well-being of women officers.

Attendees at the Research Summit on Women in Policing identified the following key research questions relevant to women’s experiences with policing culture.

**What negative aspects of policing cultures need to change for women officers to be better integrated into and integral to departments?**

Changing the culture within a department or an entire field can be a long-term and difficult undertaking. Studying the effectiveness of interventions in making women more integral and integrated in policing culture will help law enforcement executives and agencies develop effective policies to support this shift. Representatives from law enforcement agencies abroad stressed the importance of not only increasing the representation of women but also mindfully integrating women into the fabric of a department's leadership as essential steps in supporting such a culture change. Attendees noted a lack of and a need for evidence-based practices to guide departments in these interventions.

**What makes a law enforcement environment toxic for women practitioners?**

Attendees almost unanimously agreed that parts of the current American policing culture are toxic for women. Several officers said they nearly left law enforcement because of this. "No one valued me on the job," said one officer. Research that identifies the components contributing to an environment that is toxic for women will enable these components to be more effectively addressed.

"We teach police officers that everything is a threat. For women, not only can they not trust the people they're policing, they also can't trust the people who are supposed to have their backs. This is incredibly damaging to women."

**What are women police officers' perceptions and experiences of harassment in the workplace? What are effective interventions to reduce the prevalence of harassment?**

Some attendees agreed that harassment and sexism are normalized to the extent that, often, only the most egregious cases are reported. "I don't think of myself as harassed, ever," said one officer, "but a lot of the things I experience would be considered harassment in another field." Some of the limited research reflects this — many women police officers reported that they had not experienced sexual harassment but reported that they *had* experienced specific behavior that would constitute harassment. Although some studies have found declining levels of harassment in law enforcement, attendees questioned whether harassment had truly declined — or only the reporting of it. "It's become so normalized that they don't think it's at the level of harassment," one attendee said. Officers criticized weak sexual harassment policies and cumbersome, long, and non-anonymized harassment complaint processes as well as concerns about retaliation. "It's difficult to file a complaint when we have to provide our name. We have to wait hours to talk to an [internal affairs or commanding] officer. The process is horrible," said one officer. "These are roadblocks thrown up so that people won't rock the boat."

Researchers noted that harassment has changed over time, particularly with the strengthening of sexual harassment laws in the 2000s, and that there are likely generational differences between women's experiences with harassment. There was consensus that much of the harassment that women in policing currently face is subtle sexism rather than overt harassment.

One officer noted that “when women are at work, we have to deal with men treating us in a certain way and we have to be wary of it. I am constantly wary: Are you talking to me because of my mind or because of my body?” One participant noted that the conversation seemed to be framed around women police officers having to get used to being disrespected by their male counterparts, as opposed to women police officers demanding the respect they deserve. Attendees also noted that — given the nature of the profession — women officers also experienced harassment from the public during their performance of regular duties.

Attendees noted the extreme harm that sexism and harassment cause women officers. One attendee said, “We teach police officers that everything is a threat. For women, not only can they not trust the people they’re policing, they also can’t trust the people who are supposed to have their backs. This is incredibly damaging to women.”

Women are not the only group impacted by harassment. “It’s traumatic for everyone,” an attendee said. “These tentacles reach out far beyond just female police officers. When you mistreat one segment of the police department, it’s actually impacting the entire department and hurting the entire force.” Another participant raised the point that if an officer is harassing others in the workplace, that type of conduct can spill over into how that officer interacts with and treats the public.

Although there is extensive anecdotal evidence pointing to widespread harassment of women in policing, rigorous studies of women officers’ experiences with harassment would help us better understand its extent and scope, and how best to confront and reduce these instances.

“Women face a lot of trauma when they start at the police academy. Police academy is where you learn the rules, where you start to negotiate your identity. This has to be severely redone.”

### **How can law enforcement academies better serve women?**

Attendees unanimously agreed that the curricula and requirements of American police academies are not reflective of the abilities and skills officers will draw on after leaving the academy. Attendees noted an extreme emphasis on seemingly irrelevant physical requirements that are never again tested in an officer’s career. They also agreed that academy experiences are not optimally designed for women — one of the major contributing factors to a culture that does not always respect and support women officers. Attendees spoke to their difficult personal experiences in the academy and agreed that department leadership should prioritize changes to academy structure and curricula. “Women face a lot of trauma when they start at the police academy,” said one law enforcement executive. “Police academy is where you learn the rules, where you start to negotiate your identity. This has to be severely redone.” Research to understand the academy experience, and the demands on an officer after leaving the academy, can help inform future curricula to better prepare officers for the demanding day-to-day work of policing.

### **What is the impact of language in shifting or maintaining the status quo of how women are treated in law enforcement?**

Several attendees emphasized the importance of language in perpetuating challenges for women in policing. Research on the language used to discuss issues of women in policing — and policing

generally — can help identify ways that an individual’s choice of words or a policy’s wording inadvertently perpetuates discrimination, and how changes in language can help shift the status quo. Attendees noted that this starts at a young age, with simple phrases such as “like a girl” being used as an insult rather than a compliment describing confidence and strength. One attendee noted that women use weaker language on resumes and in interviews to describe their work, using phrases such as “I participated in” or “I helped” instead of “I created” or “I led.”

**How can we foster the courage to be accountable for improving the representation and experiences of women in policing?**

Attendees noted that it requires courage and strength to be an advocate for gender parity in policing. Attendees felt that there was currently a lack of incentives for department leadership and other personnel to commit to increasing parity and improving the experiences of women within their agencies. Studies that examine how to better foster this courage can help encourage additional advocates for change. One participant suggested that these activities should be required in position descriptions for department leaders and that execution of these activities (or lack thereof) should be considered in their performance reviews.

**What are the experiences of women working in police departments as civilians and contractors?**

Just as “women” is not a homogenous group, “policing” also includes many groups. Conversations about women in policing have historically focused on sworn officers, but they should be expanded to include civilians and contractors as well. Attendees noted that, in many departments, civilians were disproportionately women. For example, in the New York Police Department (NYPD), 18% of sworn officers

are women, but 68% of the civilian force is women. One attendee noted that women civilians in police departments may offer interesting insights into why some women choose not to pursue a career as an officer. Attendees suggested that policing might look to the military for trends, parallels, and lessons learned regarding sworn officers, civilians, and contractors.

**THEME 3: PERFORMANCE**

Research findings have been mixed regarding gender differences in performance. Individual studies have shown no gender differences in certain areas.<sup>9</sup> Other findings have contradicted gender stereotypes, such as a study that found men officers used more “supportive” behaviors than women officers.<sup>10</sup> Despite these mixed results, meta-analyses have confirmed that women officers are less likely than men to use force<sup>11</sup> and that men officers are significantly more likely than women to engage in police misconduct.<sup>12</sup> No research indicates that women lack the skills and abilities to perform the duties of a police officer.

Attendees at the Research Summit on Women in Policing identified the following key research questions relevant to women’s performance in policing.

**What metrics measure the extent to which women in policing thrive?**

With neither a shared definition of success nor metrics to measure it, it is impossible to determine the extent to which women in policing thrive. One researcher stated, “If women in policing want to move forward, I would argue that we need to come up with metrics for women in policing [who] are thriving. We need to come up with a way to measure it.” Although most attendees agreed with the need for metrics to measure success, they argued that these metrics should be identical to those used to measure whether male officers are thriving. One chief suggested that looking

at how many women apply for various jobs and promotions might be a good indicator of whether officers are comfortable and supported within an organization.

### **How are women impacting police organizations?**

To better understand the value of increasing the number of women in policing, we need to understand how women impact police organizations. Research might consider how departments with an increasing number of women officers in leadership and in the ranks have changed over time. “We have to look at what women in positions of power are doing for police agencies and look at agencies that do have women in these positions to see and measure impact,” said one researcher.

“We don’t want to just make women good men.”

### **Do women and men police officers perform differently? If so, how?**

Few studies have evaluated the differences between women and men officers or compared their performance. Attendees cautioned against projecting masculine metrics of good policing onto women. “We don’t want to just make women good men,” said one attendee. Additional research can help us better understand whether there are differences in the way women and men officers function and perform. One participant noted the value of exploring existing databases that capture officer demographic data (e.g., the FBI’s forthcoming use-of-force database) as a viable next step.

### **How do women and men police officers compare in regard to officer injuries and fatalities? How do they compare in regard to citizen complaints and use of force?**

Attendees noted a dearth of research on officer injuries and fatalities, and called for more of this research, particularly studies

that compared rates and types of injury and fatalities between women and men officers. Although it is difficult to generalize the results of individual research projects, studies have found that women are less likely than men to use excessive force or to under-police.

“We want to show the public that women are everywhere. We want to show the public that we have people of every shape and size and color — somebody you can identify with. And that’s good! That creates change outside. But *inside* the department, when we gerrymander women like that, they’re by themselves. I think we have to be really strategic about where women are placed within the police department.”

### **What are the advantages and disadvantages associated with assigning women officers across parts of a department versus assigning them together?**

Departments have explored various methods of placing their women officers within an agency. Some women officers reported feeling isolated if they are the only women within a unit. Other officers reported that their department placed women in units together, minimizing the representation of women across a variety of the department’s units. One attendee stated, “We want to show the public that women are everywhere. We want to show the public that we have people of every shape and size and color — somebody you can identify with. And that’s good! That creates change outside. But *inside* the department, when we gerrymander women like that, they’re by themselves. I think we have to be really strategic about where women are placed within the police department.” Research examining officer perceptions and the impact of each approach will help guide department policy and law enforcement executive thinking on this issue.

“[The department] appointed the first female to the SWAT team, and then the rest of the SWAT team quit.”

**To what extent are women deterred from taking certain assignments and positions? To what extent are the potential contributions of women in certain assignments and positions diminished?**

Anecdotal evidence shows that women are comparatively underrepresented in positions and assignments such as the SWAT team and overrepresented in clerical and other assignments. Research can help quantify this representation, to help us better understand the breakdown of women within positions and assignment types.

One attendee noted that women were “organizationally segregated” within her department, comprising nearly 20% of total officers but 3% of lieutenants and 1% of executives. She added that women were disproportionately placed in administrative roles and excluded from the SWAT team and other “elite” units. An attendee noted that when one department appointed the first woman to its SWAT team, the rest of the SWAT team quit. Attendees believed that some of the reason for a lack of women in particular positions was that women chose certain assignments to avoid particularly severe harassment and sexism among “elite” units. “I think a lot of women go to safe locations in the agency where they don’t have to deal with that every day,” one attendee said.

“When folks want to take a picture with me, I go out of my way to make sure I’m smiling. They talk about my stature. They talk about what I wear. I have to push back. When I call them on it, they step back and say, ‘Oh, we didn’t realize that’s what we were doing.’”

**How does the media portray the performance of women in policing and women in power?**

Women law enforcement executives felt strongly that there were differences in the media attention they got when compared to their male colleagues. One chief said that the media frequently portrayed her as a “bad, angry, black woman.” Other attendees spoke to “death by a million cuts” in the media, and that media coverage tended to portray power as a positive trait for men but a negative trait for women. “When folks want to take a picture with me, I go out of my way to make sure I’m smiling,” said one chief. “They write about my stature. They talk about what I wear. I have to push back. When I call them on it, they step back and say, ‘Oh, we didn’t realize that’s what we were doing.’” Research on media coverage can help quantify this issue and raise awareness of disparities in media coverage between women and men in power. Participants also noted the importance of understanding the impact of the portrayal of women police in television and movies.

**Do women and men in policing receive equal pay for equal work?**

Although anecdotal evidence suggests that women officers are paid less for equal work than their male colleagues, there are currently no large-scale rigorous studies examining the pay gap to confirm whether there are differences between the pay of men and women officers for equal work. One attendee wondered whether there is an overall pay gap because women may not pursue positions with pay incentives like night differentials as often as men do. Quantifying pay differences — if any — between women and men officers, controlling for years on the job and other factors, will be an important first step toward equal pay.

**What experiences and skills are necessary to have a successful policing career, and how can more opportunities be created for women to acquire these critical attributes?**

The field needs a better understanding of the skills and experience necessary to progress up the leadership ladder. Once these have been identified, organizations need to provide women with opportunities to gain the skills and experience needed to progress. More research is needed on key transition points and how experience accumulates to position women for success in the field of policing.

**THEME 4: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

Recent surveys of undergraduate students demonstrate that women view policing careers as inhospitable and assume it is more difficult to gain respect as women officers when compared to their male colleagues. This may impact the likelihood of these students pursuing a policing career.<sup>13</sup> Research has also found that a budget increase is the only significant predictor of a law enforcement department hiring women at an increased rate.<sup>14</sup> Overall, no standardized, empirically supported programs exist to increase the representation of women in policing.

Attendees at the Research Summit on Women in Policing identified the following key research questions relevant to the recruitment and retention of women officers.

“At interviews, people started to advise [me] on what I should expect. They said, ‘You know, you’re probably never going to be able to get married or have a relationship because men don’t like to wait at home.’ I asked myself why I was applying for a job where this was okay to tell me. So, instead of accepting, I went to grad school and studied women in policing. I did my master’s thesis on the question, ‘Why don’t women decide to become police officers?’”



(From left to right) Nicola Smith-Kea, Laura and John Arnold Foundation; Captain Paige Valenta, Madison (WI) Police Department; Dr. Anne Kringen, University of New Haven (CT); and Dr. Amie Schuck, University of Illinois, Chicago.

**Why do women decide not to become police officers? What deters them?**

Understanding the reasons that women decide not to become police officers can help law enforcement agencies change recruiting tactics to better attract and retain top talent. Law enforcement attendees spoke at length about the reasons that many of them had nearly chosen a career other than law enforcement or had nearly left the profession. A researcher had strongly considered a career in law enforcement but eventually chose to study it instead. She said, “At interviews, people started to advise [me] on what I should expect. They said, ‘You know, you’re probably never going to be able to get married or have a relationship because men don’t like to wait at home.’ I asked myself why I was applying for a job where this was okay to tell me. So, instead of accepting, I went to grad school and studied women in policing. I did my master’s thesis on the question, ‘Why don’t women decide to become police officers?’”

**How can we make the police profession more enticing to women?**

Women apply to law enforcement agencies at a much lower rate than men. Understanding the factors dissuading women from applying can help agencies attract more women applicants. Attendees spoke at length about their various impressions of policing before they joined the force. One chief, a woman of color, said that she didn't want to become a police officer because she and her contemporaries had a "natural fear" and dislike of the police. Other attendees stated that they had not seriously considered a career in law enforcement or didn't know that women could pursue careers as law enforcement officers until they experienced a ride-along or other positive interaction with a law enforcement officer, often a woman. An attendee also referenced job announcements directed toward women by the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which led to thousands of women applicants.

**Do departments have different criteria for women and men? Should they?**

Although we anecdotally know that some departments have different eligibility criteria for women and men, there is a lack of rigorous study to quantify how many departments have different criteria and to learn the scope and impact of these differences. Michigan was cited as one state with different criteria for men and women. Qualitative research has found that women do not want different standards than men for being hired or promoted; rather, they want decisions to be merit-based, using unbiased standards. Studies for understanding the scope and scale of differences in criteria — and whether these differences are necessary, relevant, and effective — can help inform department policy.

"My 10-year-old granddaughter told me, 'I've told my friends you kick butt for a living.' They're already forming their opinion of law enforcement at that age."

**How can we make policing a viable and interesting career option for girls, starting at a young age?**

Attendees agreed that the recruitment of women officers should begin at a young age. Officers expressed pride that their children had positive impressions of law enforcement careers. One chief said, "My 10-year-old granddaughter told me, 'I've told my friends you kick butt for a living.' They're already forming their opinion of law enforcement at that age." Studies to measure the impact of outreach to young populations can help inform targeted agency recruitment efforts. Studies in the military have shown that girls with mothers in the military are more likely than their peers to join the armed services. Attendees noted the value of replicating this research within policing.

"One of the big problems with recruitment, especially [of] women, is that the image from the media is that real policing is cops and robbers, going out and catching the bad guy. This isn't necessarily the day-to-day."

**What is the role of a police officer today, and how can we recruit accordingly?**

Current agency recruitment materials are often based on stereotypes about what police officers do, rather than reflecting the day-to-day roles of an officer. Attendees agreed that these materials were a barrier to attracting women. One attendee stated, "One of the big problems with recruitment, especially [of] women, is that the image from the media is that real policing is cops and robbers, going out and catching the bad guy. This isn't necessarily the



day-to-day.” Another attendee stressed the importance of recruiting materials that focus on community-oriented policing and portray policing as a service and an institution designed to serve communities. One chief said that her department aimed to do this by making their officers visible and accessible through monthly “Meet the Police” days and other events. Studying the appeal of current recruitment materials to prospective recruits, and comparing how the materials portray police officers’ roles with the actual roles law enforcement officers play, will help agency recruitment practices become more evidence-based.

In New Zealand, women make up more than 30% of total staff and nearly 20% of sworn officers. The New Zealand Police have committed to equal representation by 2021 and have intentionally focused their recruitment efforts on attracting a diverse pool of applicants that is representative of the New Zealand population. A police recruitment video from New Zealand was shown at the summit as an example of these efforts. The video features women officers, portrays police interacting with the community, emphasizes the value of communication and relationship building, and uses humor to promote a different image of police and police work.<sup>15</sup>

“We shouldn’t just recruit from criminal justice programs. We should also recruit from nursing, psychology, and other ‘serving’ programs. We can teach skills.”

### **What is the professional background of people coming into policing, and how does that impact the profession?**

We do not currently have an empirical understanding of the professional backgrounds of law enforcement officers in the United States. Understanding the impact of these backgrounds on law enforcement can help agencies better target their recruitment efforts. Attendees agreed



(From left to right) Inspector Julie Duncan, Queensland (Australia) Police Service; Inspector Tammy Fryer, Windsor (Ontario) Police Service; and Deputy Chief Kaye Ryan, New Zealand Police.

on the value of recruiting from diverse backgrounds and fields. One attendee said, “We shouldn’t just recruit from criminal justice programs. We should also recruit from nursing, psychology, and other ‘serving’ programs. We can teach skills.” Another attendee noted the importance of recruiting individuals who show potential, focusing on promising individuals who are under-employed.

### **What role can the federal government play in advancing the representation and experiences of women in policing?**

Attendees suggested that the federal government would be a helpful partner in creating a single clearinghouse of accessible research relevant to issues of women in policing, and they encourage federal agencies to engage with issues of gender parity in law enforcement. One researcher suggested the value of tying access to federal funds to an agency’s efforts to recruit and retain women. Another attendee suggested the federal government could support promising practices such as mentorship programs and leadership development courses designed specifically for women.

“I’ve made more than 1,000 arrests and not once did I have to do 24 push-ups before putting handcuffs on someone. I’ve never run a mile and a half after a suspect.”

**To what extent do hiring criteria and physical fitness requirements and tests accurately reflect the standards and skills needed to be a successful officer?**

Research shows that women are disproportionately disadvantaged by certain hiring and physical fitness requirements, and there is a lack of evidence that these tests accurately reflect the actual duties of a law enforcement officer. Attendees identified these requirements as a major challenge for women, with one participant wondering if these were deliberate attempts to “wash women out.” One attendee noted that tests for employment were based on upper body strength, thus favoring men, despite a lack of evidence that upper body strength correlated with an applicant’s success as a police officer. Other attendees agreed with this observation. One attendee noted, “I’ve made more than 1,000 arrests and not once did I have to do 24 push-ups before putting handcuffs on someone. I’ve never run a mile and a half after a suspect.” Attendees discussed changes made in the American military that revised physical fitness assessments to more accurately reflect the physical demands of the job. Understanding how requirements could better correlate with actual duties has the potential to dramatically improve the number and experiences of women in policing. One attendee noted the need for not just social science research but also extensive legal review of court rulings on the subject across the country.

“Marketing materials should show what policing is really about, not all shooting and rappelling from helicopters. We always show all the sexy stuff, but not conflict resolution, problem solving, helping people

access resources. These are the talents and skills we need to reflect in our marketing materials.”

**To what extent do agency-led representations of policing (in outward-facing communications such as recruitment videos) accurately reflect actual duties?**

Attendees expressed frustration at the disconnect between representations of policing and the reality of the job. One attendee stated, “Marketing materials should show what policing is really about, not all shooting and rappelling from helicopters. We always show all the sexy stuff, but not conflict resolution, problem solving, helping people access resources. These are the talents and skills we need to reflect in our marketing materials.” A review could help agencies understand whether their recruitment materials reflect the actual duties of law enforcement officers.

**Is rotating shift work necessary? Are other, more family-friendly policies feasible?**

Summit attendees reported that rotating shift work is difficult for families and disproportionately impacts women, and they questioned whether shift schedules and other policies truly benefit agencies. Researchers in attendance confirmed that there is little evidence in favor of shift work schedules. Research examining the impact of various schedules, including fixed-shift schedules, will help law enforcement executives understand the impacts of various schedules on officers’ performance and duties.

**Which U.S. agencies have progressive policies toward parental leave, and what is the impact of these policies?**

American law enforcement agencies have a wide variety of parental leave policies. Little research has been conducted to understand

the impact of various policies, both on officers and on the agency. Attendees stressed the need for maternity uniforms and accommodating parental policies. Reviews, comparisons, and evaluations of these policies will help agencies make informed decisions regarding parental leave. One American chief stated that her department had successfully implemented a permanent (as opposed to rotating) shift schedule, nursing rooms for mothers, six weeks of paid maternity leave for natural births, and eight weeks of paid maternity leave for cesarean sections. “That’s about commitment to being equitable to everyone,” she said. Participants also noted that increasing men’s access to benefits such as paternity leave may positively impact women’s ability to balance personal and professional responsibilities. One participant noted an increase in the number of requests from men officers for days off or shift changes to accommodate child care needs. She noted that, previously, this largely fell to women officers, who then appeared to have attendance issues when compared to their male counterparts.

### **What is the impact of postnatal nursing policies?**

There is also wide diversity in postnatal nursing policies across U.S. and international police agencies. Many agencies do not have postnatal nursing policies. An international officer shared that, in some agencies in her country, postnatal nursing policies have had a significant positive impact, and women can receive paid maternity leave for up to one full year. “These are agencies that are listening and responding to women,” she said. Many attendees doubted the feasibility of such policies in America. Studies examining the impact of various postnatal nursing practices will help agencies make informed decisions in considering and developing their own policy.

“Daycare is the No. 1 thing they talk about. If we had this, that would solve the majority of issues. We know what the issues are, but we choose not to spend our money on this.”

### **How does the availability of quality child care affect women in policing?**

Day care provision in law enforcement agencies is a highly under-researched area. One major metropolitan police department had recently convened to examine issues that disproportionately impacted its women sworn officers and civilian staff. “Day care is the No. 1 thing they talk about,” said an executive from this agency about the convening. Studies examining the cost and impact of day care provision might point to its promise as a tool to recruit and retain officers.

### **What health issues are specific to women police officers, and how can they be addressed?**

Although there are health issues that disproportionately or exclusively impact women, attendees noted that we do not have a good understanding of the best way law enforcement agencies can address and accommodate issues, including physical and mental health and wellness, stress, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide.

### **How do women and men police officers compare in regard to physical and mental health and wellness, stress, and burnout? How does this compare to other professions?**

Although research has documented the physical and mental toll of police work, attendees identified a need for increased research to compare wellness, stress, and burnout between women and men officers. Identifying these differences, if any, is the first step in developing interventions to improve wellness and reduce stress and burnout in all officers.

**Why do women leave policing, both during and after the academy? Are retention rates and reasons for leaving similar for men and women? What is the cost to departments when they lose officers, in whom they have invested significant training funds, particularly early in their career?**

A special report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that in academies with a predominantly stress-based military model (e.g., paramilitary drills, intensive physical demands, and public disciplinary measures), female recruits had a 68% completion rate compared to 81% for male recruits. In academies with a predominantly nonstress model (which includes an emphasis on academic achievement, physical training, and a supportive instructor-trainee relationship), female and male recruits both had a completion rate of 89%.<sup>16</sup> We do not have an empirical understanding of the reasons why women leave or are dismissed from academies. Similarly, we do not have an understanding of why women leave the police profession. Attendees valued information gained from current law enforcement officers, but they noted it would also be important to capture data from recruits who dropped out (e.g., through exit interviews) to better understand and address their reasons for leaving. An empirical understanding of dropout rates and the reasons behind them can help departments mitigate challenges and amend policies to better support women throughout their time at the academy and after their departure. One participant noted that the financial impact of losing women candidates and officers must also be explored, particularly given training costs and limited budgets.

“Inclusion creates diversity. We treat everyone equal. We create an environment and the diversity comes.”

**What are the characteristics of effective recruitment and retention programs with regard to women officers? What can we learn from departments that are recruiting and retaining women successfully?**

Although attendees identified several promising recruitment and retention initiatives, they called for many more of these programs, and evaluations to understand their impact. Recruitment and retention programs have not been rigorously studied. Pilot studies and rigorous evaluations of innovative recruitment and retention programs will identify promising practices for replication and further study.

Congress has supported practices to promote the recruitment of women to the armed services. These include family-friendly programs to support dual military families, such as the largest child care program in the United States. A career intermission program allows parents to take sabbaticals from the service to raise children and to take up to 12 weeks of paid family leave. Other changes include updating combat gear to better fit women's bodies, updating the command culture to address sexual harassment in the armed services, and using centralized processes like command climate surveys to keep track of the command culture. Attendees encouraged exploring the feasibility of similar measures in policing.

Attendees believed that we can learn from departments with higher rates of success in recruiting and retaining women. Australia has made impressive progress in the recruitment and retention of women. One officer from the Queensland Police Service said, “Inclusion creates diversity. We treat everyone [as] equal. We create an environment and the diversity comes.”

“The biggest obstacle for women in police work is the ability to balance work and family life. A lot of women simply opt out of policing for this reason.”

### **How can departments better help women balance their professional and personal lives?**

There was consensus among attendees that the difficulty of balancing professional and personal responsibilities was a major factor driving women to leave policing or choose a different career from the outset. “The biggest obstacle for women in police work is the ability to balance work and family life,” said one attendee. “A lot of women simply opt out of policing for this reason.” Research can help departments understand how certain policies might help officers balance their professional and personal lives without significant financial and other costs to the agency.

Attendees agreed that departments must prioritize policy changes that would help officers balance their professional and personal lives better. Rather than seeing these policy changes as a burden for a department, attendees stressed that departments should see this as an opportunity to attract and retain the best officers. Attendees noted that if departments did not frame the conversation in that way, they would risk wasting significant resources in their talent pool. Additionally, participants discussed the fact that these types of considerations could — and possibly should — be relevant for all officers, not just women.

### **THEME 5: PROMOTION**

Promotion of women officers to higher ranks has not been well studied. Limited existing research suggests that many qualified women candidates face disproportionate barriers to promotion when compared with their male



Major Wendy Stiver, Dayton (OH) Police Department.

counterparts. Studies have found that women officers were treated as tokens, were subjected to sexual harassment, and received messages from male supervisors that their promotions would be based on their gender rather than qualifications and merit.<sup>17</sup> Additional research has found that women may not pursue opportunities for promotion because they lack confidence, paired with a lack of structured support for maintaining a personal life and raising children while handling the demands of a policing career.<sup>18</sup>

Attendees at the Research Summit on Women in Policing identified the following key research questions relevant to the promotion of women officers.

“Women have been told it will be twice as hard to do this as a woman.”

#### **What is the representation of women in law enforcement across ranks?**

We know that women are underrepresented in law enforcement, particularly in leadership positions. A better empirical understanding of the exact representation of women across ranks, both within departments and nationally, will establish a baseline against which to measure progress.

“Who has access to power?” asked one attendee. “What are the pathways? We have to look at the structural factors that are leading this.” Others noted that it would not be surprising to find a small number of women at higher ranks because of the barriers women face. “Women have been told it will be twice as hard to do this as a woman,” one officer said.

“At a hostage rescue training, I remember thinking ‘I don’t think my skill sets are going to result in a positive resolution.’ All of my male colleagues were brimming with confidence, but I didn’t have the self-confidence to question them. Shortly after, I retired from the team.”

### **Why are women not being promoted nor seeking promotion at the rates one might expect?**

Attendees at the summit noted that one reason for a lack of women in leadership positions stemmed from women not applying for these opportunities. Research in analogous fields suggests that women are more hesitant than men in applying for promotion and more likely to doubt their qualifications. Many attendees shared stories of such experiences. For example, one attendee said the following: “At a hostage rescue training, I remember thinking, ‘I don’t think my skill sets are going to result in a positive resolution.’ All of my male colleagues were brimming with confidence, but I didn’t have the self-confidence to question them. Shortly after, I retired from the team.” One female participant noted that women officers told her they did not want to go through the process of having to prove that a woman could do what the men had been doing. Another female participant raised the issue of a lack of access to career development training and pointed to the traditionally male-centric networking that occurs at events like golf, cigar nights, and fishing trips. Further research will illuminate

whether women in law enforcement do seek promotion at a rate lower than that of their male counterparts and, if so, why.

“When we talk about the ‘good old boy network,’ I am living it. It’s very deep-rooted and the culture is very bad. The mindset is that women belong at home, cooking for their spouses.”

### **Do women face discrimination in the promotion process?**

There was widespread belief among attendees that women officers face discrimination in the promotion process. Many officers shared stories of being passed over despite scoring highly on promotion exams, and Harrington stated that her department chose not to fill nearly 10 positions rather than promote her. Many attendees felt that the promotion process was subjective and biased against women. “To get to lieutenant in my agency, it’s completely up to the chief’s discretion,” said one officer. Officers also spoke about their experiences with nepotism and entitlement, both within the promotion process and in day-to-day activities. One chief stated, “When we talk about the ‘good old boy network,’ I am living it. It’s very deep-rooted and the culture is very bad. The mindset is that women belong at home, cooking for their spouses.” Studies to examine discrimination in the promotion process can help us understand it empirically. Researchers should carefully consider methodology and data collection to ensure that analysis can delineate discrimination based on gender, race, and other factors.

“Power: for men it’s viewed as a positive but for women it’s a negative.”

### **How do people view power and ambition in women officers compared to how they view their male counterparts?**

Summit attendees felt that differences in the way power and ambition are viewed

by women and by men have an impact on how women officers are perceived and, ultimately, on their ability to successfully do their jobs. One attendee said, “Power: for men it’s viewed as a positive but for women it’s a negative.” An attendee raised the common conception of a woman in leadership as “shrill, unlikable, needs to smile more.” Another noted a reluctance to promote women because of the assumption that a woman in a leadership position would be unlikable. Existing research in analogous fields may be helpful when considering research designs for investigating this issue.

Attendees agreed that traditional command presence is laden with masculine norms. Women law enforcement executives believed they had repeatedly received less respect than their male counterparts throughout their careers because they did not conform to these masculine norms, despite being effective leaders. Attendees urged a shift away from these traditional masculine norms to a more open-minded definition of an effective leader.

Several law enforcement executives at the summit agreed that they had needed to make many more sacrifices over the course of their careers than their male counterparts. One executive stated that because she felt constant criticism for being “a woman, and so weaker,” she had never been able to let her guard down and had felt pressure to constantly project a traditionally masculine command presence “that wasn’t me or my leadership style.” A second executive agreed that differences in the ways power and ambition are viewed across gender made it necessary for her to work harder than her male counterparts to earn respect, and her successes were often criticized as being too ambitious.

Instead of ambition being seen as an asset, one attendee said it was portrayed as “watch out, she’s ambitious.” She noted that she was frequently accused of using

her position (chief of a major metropolitan department) as a stepping stone to “something bigger and better,” a criticism she doubted most of her male counterparts experienced. A different chief stressed the importance of women being champions of change in shifting this narrative. She noted that whenever she heard a woman being criticized as ambitious, she would respond, “That’s great, so am I.”

“From a research perspective, we need to learn from these women about their successes. What pathways got them there? We need to be very purposeful about that.”

**Are women more likely to be promoted into leadership positions in organizations experiencing a legitimacy crisis (i.e., the glass cliff)? If so, what can be done to help these women be more successful leaders?**

The “glass cliff” theory suggests that women have a higher likelihood of being placed in leadership positions within departments in crisis, where they are more likely to fail. Examining the context of women leaders in law enforcement will either affirm or debunk this theory. Interviews with women executives in departments in crisis, as well as other forms of research, can help inform actions to support women in these positions. One researcher said, “From a research perspective, we need to learn from these women about their successes. What pathways got them there? We need to be very purposeful about that.”

Attendees identified a number of unanswered questions around women officers and promotion, including a lack of understanding of the leadership opportunities that women receive and the context behind these opportunities. Although many believed that women are often put in positions of leadership within departments in crisis, there was some disagreement about whether this was negative. “Every challenge is an

opportunity,” noted one attendee about the glass cliff theory. “No matter what department, we should leave it better than we found it.”

### **What is the impact of women taking women-specific leadership training compared to general policing training?**

A number of training and other professional development programs exist specifically for women officers. Attendees were divided in their opinions of these trainings. Although most felt that the women-specific trainings were helpful, there was also discussion that participation in such a program could “use up” an officer’s professional development opportunities, making it less likely that she would have the opportunity to attend the FBI National Academy or other prestigious trainings.

“A man can spend a year on patrol and get seven years credit. A woman gets a quarter credit.”

### **What is necessary for women to be at least proportionately represented in leadership?**

Attendees felt confident that empirical research would show significant disparities between men and women regarding promotion and opportunity. “A man can spend a year on patrol and get seven years’ credit. A woman gets a quarter credit,” said one officer. Other attendees felt they were more often judged on their hair, makeup, and clothing than on valid qualifications. Studies are needed to explore this apparent disparity and understand how to increase women’s access to promotion and opportunity.

Attendees felt that the first step toward increasing promotions of women was understanding how the structure of an organization, the policies and practices guiding it, and its leadership’s outlook affect the number of women promoted.

Attendees also felt that understanding typical paths to promotion — and how these differed from the paths of women officers not promoted — would help identify factors contributing to a lack of parity. To general agreement, one attendee prioritized the question, “How do people get into spaces that we have deemed jumping-off points for leadership?” Attendees identified jumping-off points like experience in SWAT teams and other elite units, and competitive training such as the FBI National Academy, and they mentioned the importance of developmental or “reach” assignments. One attendee noted the particular importance of women consciously seeking opportunities to attend established and respected executive development programs. Another pointed to the logistical challenges of needing to be away from home (in many cases, for weeks) in order to attend.

“Women are change catalysts within police organizations. Instead of asking ‘are women making it in policing?’ when are we going to start asking ‘how are women impacting police organizations in positive ways?’ I’d love to see the research move away from whether women are making it to how they are positively impacting.”

### **What is the impact of an increased number of women in leadership?**

Studies examining promising and effective practices will help increase the number of women in law enforcement leadership positions. Equally important will be measuring the impact of women in leadership positions on individual officers, law enforcement agencies, and communities. Attendees stressed the importance of studying this impact. One attendee said, “Women are change catalysts within police organizations. Instead of asking, ‘Are women making it in policing?’ when are we going to start asking, ‘How are women impacting police organizations



in positive ways? I'd love to see the research move away from whether women are making it to how they are positively impacting."

"When I was promoted to sergeant, I was the first and only female sergeant in our organization. It wasn't until I was surrounded by all these amazing women, willing to talk about their experiences and what they were going through, that I could say, 'Hey, I can do this.'"

**Does mentoring work? What does successful mentoring look like? What are the advantages and disadvantages of women and men mentors?**

Many attendees pointed to mentoring as one of the most influential factors in their careers and a way to help women be successful in an adversarial system. One attendee said, "When I was promoted to sergeant, I was the first and only female sergeant in our organization. It wasn't until I was surrounded by all these amazing women, willing to talk about their experiences and what they were going through, that I could say, 'Hey, I can do this.'"

Not all departments have women who can serve in a mentorship capacity. One officer noted that she had to drive an hour to find another woman in a command position. In small departments in particular, officers often felt they were "n = 1," the only woman, without others to turn to for inspiration and guidance. Attendees proposed a statewide or national network of women mentors that would cross departmental lines.

Attendees also noted that women sometimes choose not to mentor or otherwise support each other, and that this is detrimental. "We have to get out of this 'crabs in a bucket' syndrome," said one chief about unhealthy competition and hostility between women. "There's so much to go



(From left to right) Lt. Rachel Tolber, Redlands (CA) Police Department; Chief Carmen Best, Seattle (WA) Police Department; and Dr. Marisa Silvestri, University of Kent (England).

around. We have to stand up for each other." Another participant noted the extreme importance of women choosing to mentor other women who are new to the profession.

Summit attendees also discussed the pros and cons of having men or women as mentors. Men were more commonly in positions of authority and influence and were less able to identify with a woman officer's personal experiences, particularly navigating a male-dominated culture as a woman. Attendees reflected on their positive experiences with men as mentors and advocates, noting that the male perspective was particularly helpful in navigating the leadership structure.

## Field Priorities

Summit participants selected 15 of the most important questions to put forward in the research agenda. They are ranked in order of importance, based on votes by the attendees.

1. What barriers do women in policing face?<sup>19</sup> How do these barriers compare to barriers women face in other professions?

2. How can law enforcement agencies — in partnership with other organizations — improve data collection and measures to better inform efforts to improve the representation and experiences of women in policing?
3. Why are women not being promoted nor seeking promotion at the rates one might expect?
4. What is the relationship between race, ethnicity, and gender in these issues? Between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender? What are the specific experiences of officers who are women of color, and how does the intersection of gender and race affect the challenges women of color face in this occupation?
5. What role can/do men play in improving the representation and experiences of women in policing?
6. What is the impact of an increased number of women in leadership?
7. What is the role of a police officer today and how can we recruit accordingly?
8. What are the characteristics of effective recruitment and retention programs with regard to women officers? What can we learn from departments that are recruiting and retaining women successfully?
9. What negative aspects of policing cultures need to change in order for women officers to be better integrated into and integral to departments?
10. What is the most effective business case for advancing women in policing?
11. What experience and skills are necessary to have a successful policing career, and how can more opportunities be created for women to acquire these critical attributes?
12. How can we make the police profession more enticing to women?
13. Does mentoring work? What does successful mentoring look like? What are the advantages and disadvantages of women and men mentors?
14. What are the experiences of women working in police departments as civilians and contractors?
15. What is necessary for women to be at least proportionately represented in leadership?

## Promising Practices and Next Steps

Attendees identified a number of promising practices. These recommendations reflect the opinions of attendees at the summit. They are not necessarily evidence-based and do not reflect the official position of the National Institute of Justice.

### *Support mentoring and sponsorship.*

Attendees almost unanimously agreed that having strong role models, advocates, and mentors (both women and men) among law enforcement leaders was important in a woman officer's career track and success. They pointed to the need for national or statewide networks to mentor women officers who may not have women leaders within their own organizations to look up to. "Some agencies don't have enough women — or none — to do this," said one attendee. "We need to find a way to reach into these spaces to connect women with mentors to help them be successful in a system that doesn't want them to be successful." Attendees noted the value of women officers supporting and lifting up other women officers, rather than competing or fighting with each other.

*Create flexible, family-friendly policies.* The research suggests that agencies with higher levels of procedural, distributive, and interpersonal justice are more efficient and effective organizations. Law enforcement organizations need to identify and adopt standards that promote equality and equity for all employees. Policies that have a disproportionate negative impact on

a group of workers should be reviewed and changed. The long-term benefits of promising practices such as family-friendly policies (e.g., parental leave, postnatal nursing, and nonrotating shift schedules) should be explored.

***Improve and enforce harassment policies.***

Beyond the initial harm of a harassment incident, attendees enumerated the many difficulties faced by women filing sexual harassment claims. These included retaliation, waiting hours to speak to an internal affairs or commanding officer about a complaint, unnecessarily lengthy and cumbersome processes, and the lack of assurance that complaints would remain anonymous and confidential.

***Find advocates for change.*** Women did not create the barriers and challenges that they face in policing, and they will not solve these issues alone. Allies will be integral in making progress. Attendees identified police chiefs, male counterparts, mayors, trade organizations, and politicians as groups that could serve as partners.

***Re-examine physical fitness standards.***

Physical fitness standards were identified as one of the key reasons that women recruits did not complete academy training, yet attendees noted that these requirements were largely not based on evidence nor reflective of the physical requirements of the job. Re-examining and revising these standards to more accurately reflect the physical demands of the job has the potential to dramatically increase the number of women in policing. Some attendees noted the need for more rigorous assessments of other, nonphysical requirements, such as emotional intelligence, negotiation and de-escalation ability, and interpersonal skills.

***Support women.*** After finding that women failed out of police academy at a rate two to three times that of men, officers formed the Women's Leadership Academy in

Newark, New Jersey, to help women recruits pass physical fitness tests, create a network of women officers, advocate for these officers, and increase the recruitment and promotion of women in law enforcement. Similar programs can provide important community, support, and advocacy for women officers.

One attendee spoke about a quarterly meeting she had started after she became the first and only woman in a leadership position in her small agency. She invited all of the women in her agency to the meeting but noted that almost all attendees were nonsworn officers. She noted that the women who attend “have great ideas about how to improve things,” and that she was continuing to work to increase participation from sworn officers.

***Reframe the profession.*** Attendees criticized stereotypes of policing as masculine and violent. They called for a shift in emphasis toward community policing, valuing relationships, and increasing trust. Attendees believed this shift would increase the appeal of policing for women, more accurately portray policing's mission, and result in a stronger, more effective police profession. They noted the successful shift in police departments abroad from “police force” to “police service” as a promising model for framing this necessary shift.

***Look to the “bright spots.”*** With approximately 30% women, the Madison (Wisconsin) Police Department has one of the highest percentages of women officers in the country. Some Canadian agencies offer progressive policies, such as postnatal nursing and extended paid parental leave. Medicine, technology, the military, and other fields have made progress toward parity, and these should be viewed as allied fields when considering how to make progress on issues related to women in policing. These “bright spots” can offer lessons.



Deputy Commissioner (retired) Nola Joyce, Philadelphia (PA) Police Department.

***Publish issue briefs on relevant research.***

Attendees expressed a desire for easy-to-digest issue briefs that would summarize all relevant research on an issue in one place. They suggested a target audience of city managers, unions, and police executives.

***Convene follow-up meetings.*** NIJ's research summit was a first step toward understanding and making progress on the state of women in policing, but additional meetings are needed to collect more input from the field, explore priority areas in greater detail, and generate promising practices. Attendees suggested that, in follow-up meetings, women attendees might bring a male officer from their department. Attendees also suggested that focus groups of women officers would be helpful to delve into specific issues at greater length.

***Create a space for relevant research.***

Attendees pointed to the lack of a centralized database or other source of information for law enforcement leaders who want to learn more about how to work toward parity. "There's no one place, that's part of the problem," an attendee said about research relevant to women in policing, and best practices for shifting an agency's culture and increasing parity.

***Evaluate the impact of interventions.*** With a lack of rigorous research, many initiatives for increasing the number of women in

policing are pilot projects. Evaluating interventions to measure and quantify their impact will create an evidence base to help departments understand what works.

***Learn from research in other fields.*** Like women in policing, women in medicine also face significant barriers. Dr. Linda Pololi described how she has helped build a consortium of five medical schools to examine issues of women in medicine. After conducting in-depth interviews with both men and women who work in medical schools, Dr. Pololi's team performed a quantitative analysis and ultimately developed a survey of medical schools' approach to women in academic leadership positions. This research helped illustrate the challenges that women in medicine face, differences in perception between men and women, and promising steps for making progress. Similar research and methodologies would be helpful in better understanding issues of women in policing.

***Learn from successful efforts abroad.***

Representation of women in U.S. policing is especially low when compared to many of our international counterparts. Law enforcement participants from New Zealand, Australia, and Canada shared steps their agencies have taken not only to recruit and retain women in greater numbers but also to completely transform the mission of their departments — thus creating an environment where diversity is not only welcomed but celebrated. Transferability assessments of these efforts could identify a framework for how U.S. agencies may apply similar strategies.

***Prioritize the issue.*** The New York Police Department has a unit dedicated to equity and inclusion, and it recently convened a women's institute to look at issues that disproportionately impact women in the agency who are sworn officers, civilians, and contractors. This was done with full support of the commissioner and demonstrates the department's

commitment to the issue. Creating units with the dedicated purpose of understanding the issues women officers face, and supporting these officers, creates infrastructure within an agency's organization that can be powerful in shifting its culture and practices. "It's very intentional," said one officer about the initiatives in New York City. "It does create angst. There are some folks that are very disturbed. As they should be. I would encourage anyone interested in doing this to reach out."

**Invest in partnerships.** This research agenda is only the first step in a long road toward gender equality in policing. Law enforcement, researchers, and other stakeholders will need to establish and maintain strong partnerships to answer the research questions in this research agenda, and many more. Law enforcement executives will need to commit to supporting and valuing the women officers in their departments.

**Reframe conversations about women in policing.** Conversations about the challenges that women in policing face often focus on the ways that law enforcement agencies can better accommodate their women employees. Asking instead how agencies can optimally use their talent pool reframes the conversation around opportunities for departments to optimize their resources.

**Commit to long-term work.** Advancing women in policing should not be seen as a series of short-term solutions. The barriers that women in policing face were not created overnight, and quick-fix solutions are likely to be ineffective in the long term. Changing the negative aspects of the culture of an organization or in the policing field takes time and effort. Many of the issues women in policing face are not specific to policing; rather, they are reflective of broader societal issues. Attendees called for a long-term

commitment to engaging with gender issues both in the policing field and beyond.

## Notes

1. The terms "law enforcement" and "policing" are used somewhat interchangeably in this report. For the purposes of this convening, law enforcement includes police, sheriffs, and other peace officers. It does not include correctional officers, prosecutors, or other practitioners, although many of the issues are also relevant to those stakeholder groups.
2. 2013 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics data indicated that 9.5% of first-line supervisors were women, and 2.7% of chiefs or executives were women.
3. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2016* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016), <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016>.
4. Amie M. Schuck, "Female Representation in Law Enforcement: The Influence of Screening, Unions, Incentives, Community Policing, CALEA, and Size," *Police Quarterly* 17 no. 1 (2014): 54-78.
5. The background information at the beginning of each theme is adapted from a literature review compiled by Kristin Silver in advance of the December research summit. These paragraphs are intended solely to provide limited background on existing research relevant to each theme. They are not intended to represent the full extent of all relevant literature. Kristin Silver, *Women in Policing* (2018), unpublished manuscript.
6. For more information on the Women's Leadership Academy, visit <https://www.womensleadpd.org>.

7. Cara Rabe-Hemp, *Thriving in an All-Boys Club: Female Police and Their Fight for Equality* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).
8. Anne Li Kringen and Madeleine Novich, "Is It 'Just Hair' or Is It 'Everything'? Embodiment and Gender Repression in Policing," *Gender, Work & Organization* 25 no. 2 (2018): 195-213, doi:10.1111/gwao.12207.
9. Richard J. Lundman, "Officer Gender and Traffic Ticket Decisions: Police Blue or Women Too?" *Journal of Criminal Justice* 37 no. 4 (2009): 342-352, doi:10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2009.06.002.
10. Cara Rabe-Hemp, "Female Officers and the Ethic of Care: Does Officer Gender Impact Police Behaviors?" *Journal of Criminal Justice* 36 no. 5 (2008): 426-434, doi:10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2008.07.001.
11. P. Colin Bolger, "Just Following Orders: A Meta-Analysis of the Correlates of American Police Officer Use of Force Decisions," *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 40 no. 3 (2014): 466-492, doi:10.1007/s12103-014-9278-y; and Natalie Todak, "The Decision to Become a Police Officer in a Legitimacy Crisis," *Women & Criminal Justice* 27 no. 4 (2017): 250-270, doi:10.1080/08974454.2016.1256804.
12. Timothy M. Maher, "Police Sexual Misconduct: Female Police Officers' Views Regarding Its Nature and Extent," *Women & Criminal Justice* 20 no. 3 (2010): 263-282, doi:10.1080/08974454.2010.490480.
13. Josie Francesca Cambareri and Joseph B. Kuhns, "Perceptions and Perceived Challenges Associated With a Hypothetical Career in Law Enforcement: Differences Among Male and Female College Students," *Police Quarterly* 21 no. 3 (2018): 335-357, doi:10.1177/1098611118760862.
14. William T. Jordan, Lorie Fridell, Donald Faggiani, and Bruce Kubu, "Attracting Females and Racial/Ethnic Minorities to Law Enforcement," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 37 no. 4 (2009): 333-341.
15. Watch the recruiting video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9psILoYmCc#action=share>.
16. Bureau of Justice Statistics, "State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies, 2006," Special Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/slleta06.pdf>.
17. Carol A. Archbold and Dorothy Moses Schulz, "Making Rank: The Lingering Effects of Tokenism on Female Police Officers' Promotion Aspirations," *Police Quarterly* 11 no. 1 (2008): 50-73, doi:10.1177/1098611107309628.
18. Carol A. Archbold and Kimberly D. Hassell, "Paying a Marriage Tax: An Examination of the Barriers to the Promotion of Female Police Officers," *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management* 32 no. 1 (2009): 56-74, doi:10.1108/13639510910937111.
19. Although the largest number of participants ranked this question as a priority, there was some discussion as to whether part of the limited research funding should be used to explore it, given that some participants felt many of the barriers are well-known. They suggested that research might be more impactful if it focuses on promising practices for overcoming barriers and/or how these barriers compare to those in other fields.

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