



Milwaukee Fire & Police Commission

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

Fire & Police Commission Strategic Plan





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Introduction

This report provides a detailed, comprehensive overview of the Fire and Police Commission's (FPC's) strategic plan and efforts to recruit and hire dedicated and qualified police officers to serve the city of Milwaukee. One of the FPC's top priorities is to increase the overall size of Milwaukee's police force. At the same time, we seek to maintain the high standards that currently exist within our testing and vetting process. Doing so will not only strengthen the departments and improve public safety, it will create additional family supporting jobs and ensure the city remains compliant with the requirements of [2023 Wisconsin Act 12](#) (*hereinafter* "Act 12").

While this report provides an overview of the FPC's recruiting and hiring plan, it is important to keep in mind that most, if not all, of the plan's components have previously been presented to and discussed at numerous public meetings. Those presentations have been tailored to the various communication files requested by the Common Council's Public Safety & Health Committee, as well as the FPC's Testing & Recruiting Committee. Members of the public can view recordings of those communication files through the [Milwaukee Legistar System](#). A non-exhaustive list of some of those communication files includes:

- File No. FPC212351 – Communication from FPC staff relating to police officer recruitment efforts and progress (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 1/13/26).
- File No. FPC212349– Communication from FPC staff relating to progression of police officer candidates through the application and testing process (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 1/13/26).
- File No. FPC212202 – Communication from FPC staff relating to police officer recruitment efforts and progress (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 9/9/25).
- File No. FPC212128 – Communication from FPC staff relating to police officer recruitment progress and efforts (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 7/15/25).
- File No. FPC212127 – Communication from FPC staff relating to the FPC's contract with Safeguard Recruiting for police recruitment services (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 7/15/25).
- File No. FPC211984 – Communication from FPC staff relating to advertising and recruiting plan for the police officer position (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 3/11/25).
- File No. FPC211904 – Communication from FPC staff relating to police officer recruitment and hiring efforts in 2024, and recruitment and hiring strategies and plan for 2025 (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 1/7/25).
- File No. FPC211859 – Communication from FPC staff relating to police officer recruitment efforts and strategy (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 11/21/24).

- File No. 241084 – Communication from the Fire and Police Commission relating to their recruitment strategy and plan to fill the three 2025 Police Department classes of 65 recruits each (Public Safety & Health Committee, 11/14/24).
- File No. 240887 – Communication from the Fire and Police Commission and the Milwaukee Police Department relating to efforts and progress with recruiting new police officers and police aides (Public Safety & Health Committee, 10/3/24).
- File No. FPC211612 – Communication from Fire and Police Commission staff and the Milwaukee Police Department relating to efforts and progress with recruiting new police officers and police aides (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 9/12/24).
- File No. FPC211408 – Communication relating to recruitment strategies and objectives for the police officer position (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 11/9/23).
- File No. FPC211324 – Communication relating to FPC recruitment strategies and efforts (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 9/14/23)
- File No. FPC211026 – Communication relating to police officer and firefighter recruitment efforts, objectives, and strategies (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 3/9/23).

Strategic Plan Overview

The FPC’s strategic plan for increasing the size of Milwaukee’s police force consists of two main components – **recruiting** and **testing and hiring**.

Recruiting. For the recruiting component, the FPC seeks to increase and maximize the number of applications we receive to ensure a broad and high-quality pool of applicants for the police officer position. To accomplish this goal, the FPC employs a number of tactics, including:

- Conducting robust recruiting at community events, job fairs, and other strategic locations;
- Using targeted advertising and social media outreach; and
- Maximizing opportunities for candidates to apply and targeting all potential applicant populations, including new and under-leveraged populations.

Testing & Hiring. With respect to our testing and hiring efforts, we seek to increase the percentage of applicants who are ultimately hired into the training academy. The strategic aims of this goal include improving and modernizing our testing and hiring process to reduce unnecessary friction and barriers, while at the same time:

- Maintaining high testing standards;
- Ensuring a fair, competitive, and merit-based hiring process; and

To accomplish these goals, FPC staff work closely with the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners, the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD), and other city leaders and

organizations to maximize our effectiveness. Our efforts include several tried-and-true tactics, as well as a number of newly implemented or planned initiatives.

In addition, we continually assess and evaluate the effectiveness and success of our work. We are committed to bridging the gap between the people of Milwaukee and MPD by increasing our presence within the community and encouraging positive interactions between the community and MPD members. And, we are always looking for new ideas and ways to improve our operations. As the landscape of the workforce continues to change and evolve, the FPC has continued to develop and deploy new recruitment strategies to grow the size of MPD's officer corps.

While the importance of recruiting and hiring qualified candidates for the department cannot be overstated, we also cannot ignore the reality that despite recruitment efforts increasing across the nation, hiring and retention remains a nationwide challenge.¹ To respond to this challenge, the FPC has recently implemented several new initiatives to build on our more traditional efforts. A few examples include moving to a more applicant-focused, continuous recruitment model; expanding our recruiting and testing staff; increasing our advertisement partnerships and budget; and offering online testing options to candidates to reduce some of the barriers within the hiring process.

Recruiting for the position of police officer poses unique challenges that recruiting for other civilian positions does not. Law enforcement careers are not just an employment opportunity—they are a request for individuals to make a commitment to protect and serve their community, to place their lives on the line, and put the mission of the department above their own. With this in mind, the FPC has begun to pivot in its approaches to police officer recruitment and hiring. The shift began during the 2023 recruitment campaigns. Ideas that proved effective in the past were implemented again, while efforts that did not yield results were either modified or discarded altogether. All of this is done in an effort to build a dedicated and high performing police force to serve the people of Milwaukee.

The following report provides a detailed overview of the FPC's recruiting and hiring strategies and tactics, our key performance indicators, and our plan to improve our efforts moving forward.

¹ See Police 1, *6 Trends to Watch in American Policing in 2025*, Dec. 26, 2025), <https://www.police1.com/year-in-review/6-trends-to-watch-in-american-policing-in-2026>; Police Executive Research Forum, August, 2023, "Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention," <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/RecruitmentRetention.pdf>.

FPC Police Officer Recruitment Efforts

Recruiting at Community Events and Job Fairs

A main component of the FPC's recruitment efforts is on-the-ground recruiting at strategic locations throughout the city, such as community events, career and resource fairs, open houses, faith-based events, and colleges and technical schools. While this type of recruiting has long been employed by the FPC, in recent years we have sought to expand our presence and visibility in the community. The ultimate goal of these efforts is not only to recruit more police officers, but to improve community-police relations in Milwaukee.

In the fall of 2023, the FPC sought and received funding to add a second recruiter position to its ranks. As such, the FPC now employs two full-time recruiters (one of whom is a bilingual recruiter), along with a bilingual community outreach coordinator, who work closely with the police department



to attract qualified candidates to pursue careers in law enforcement. The FPC's recruiters participate in numerous job fairs and other recruiting events each year and actively communicate with thousands of potential candidates in person and by phone, text, and email—making sure their questions are answered and they are ready for each step in the application and testing process.

The addition of a second recruiter has greatly expanded the FPC's capacity to attend a variety of community events and job fairs, and build more partnerships with community organizations, academic institutions, and business organizations. Likewise, as we explore additional recruitment tactics, new advertising partnerships, and improved branding and social media outreach, having a second staff member with specialized knowledge and experience in these areas will be invaluable.

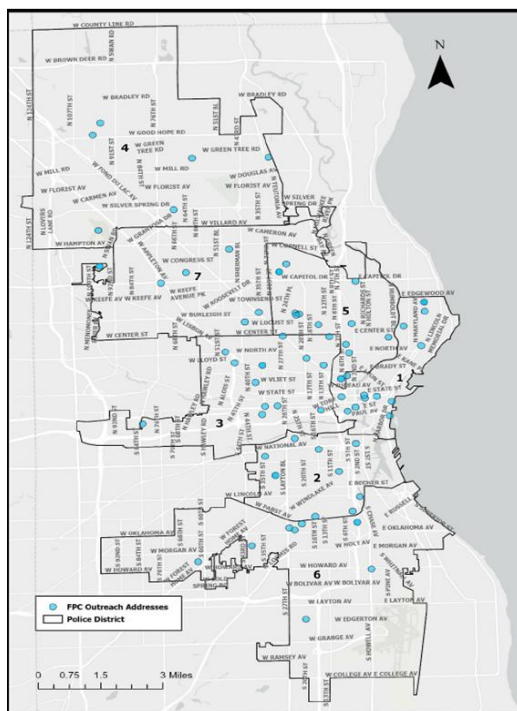
Another key aspect of our work includes recruiting at Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and MPS events. Our goal is to build a pipeline of young candidates, with a particular focus on recruiting them for our [police aide program](#). Police aides are civilian employees between the ages of 17 and 19 who serve in a paid, one to two-year apprenticeship-style program designed to prepare them for careers as Milwaukee police officers. Similar to expanding our general recruitment

footprint, the addition of a second recruiter allows the FPC to visit more MPS schools to recruit high school students who may be interested in careers in law enforcement.

The increase in community engagement efforts (as opposed to solely focusing on recruitment) is part of a broader strategy to create a stronger bridge between the community and the law enforcement members who serve it. Our hope is that these efforts will improve police-community relations and trust, and inspire community members to consider becoming a Milwaukee police officer.

Recent Outreach Numbers. Overall in 2025, FPC recruiters attended a total of 106 separate recruitment and community events, and hosted an additional 77 test prep sessions. The following is a list of a few of those events:

- Center for Veteran Issues: Job Club, UW-Milwaukee Criminal Justice Student Association Presentation, Marquette Class Presentation, Transition High School Class Visit, Milwaukee All Professions Career Fair, Girls' Day, Greater Milwaukee Urban League: Level Up Youth Fair, MPS Senior Job Fair, Career Day at Auer Avenue, 2025 Running Rebels Life & College Fair, Job Fair with MPD District 5, Carmen Southeast Career Resource Fair, South Division HS Career Fair, Alverno College Career Fair, MKE Peace Week: Career Fair, Mitchell St. Library Job & Resource Fair, UMOs Career Expo Spring 2025, Nuevo Mercado El Rey: Saturday Resource Table, Pulaski High School Presentation, Milwaukee Public Library Teen Job Fair, Puerto Rican Festival, Milwaukee Night Market, District 3 Block Party, Juneteenth Day Celebration, Common Council Job Fairs: Northcott & Atkinson, MKE Center St. Career Fair.



Advertising, Marketing, and Social Media Outreach

In addition to a notable presence at community events and career fairs, the FPC uses a wide array of advertisements to recruit for the police officer position. Some of our traditional advertisements include:

Flyers distributed at public libraries, community centers, and gyms like Planet Fitness and Crunch Fitness, which are available in English, Spanish, and Hmong.

More Than an OFFICER
...Join and be the difference you want to see!

Now Hiring
Salary Rate
\$73,188.76 - \$97,575.19
(Yearly pay increase for the first 5 years)
Overtime Available

BENEFITS

- Health, Medical, Dental, Vision
- Paid sick leave & Paid vacation days
- Tuition & text book reimbursement

SPECIALTY UNITS

- K-9 Unit
- Tactical Unit
- Harbor Patrol
- Mounted Patrol
- Motorcycle Unit

APPLY TODAY
Text "Police Officer" to
(414) 519-6190
for text updates.

MILWAUKEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Más que un OFICIAL
... ¡únete a la diferencia que quieres ver!

Está Contratando
Rango Salarial
\$73,188.76-\$97,575.19
(Aumento salarial los primeros 5 años)
Tiempo Extra Disponible

Prestaciones

- Seguros Médico, Dental y Visión
- Días por Enfermedad y Vacaciones Pagados
- Reembolso de Colegatura y Libros

Unidades Especiales

- Unidad Canina (K-9)
- Táctica
- Policía del Puerto
- Policía Montada
- Policía Motorizada

Aplicar hoy
Manda el mensaje
"Police Officer" al
(414) 519-6190
Para actualizaciones por mensaje de texto.

DE MILWAUKEE DE POLICIA DEPARTAMENTO

Nws Yog Ib Txoj Hauj Lwm Loj Tshaj ib tug TUB CEEV XWM
...Kawm nws yog pob khob ib tug gorm txawv uas koj xav gorm kom txhawv sim!

Tab Tom Ntiav Neeg Ua Hauj Lwm Nyiaj Xyoo
\$73,188.76-\$97,575.19
(Nce nyiaj txhua xyoo hauv thawj 5 xyoo)
Muaj Hauj Lwm Overtime Ua

COV NENEFITS

- Muaj ntawv kho mob, kho hnaij, kho qhov muag
- Them nyiaj rau ib tug hawnv muaj nroob ua tsis tau hauv lwm & thaujv so tsis ua hauj lwm
- Them npe kawm ntawv & nroov nyiaj rov qab rau cov npe xyaw ntawv

UA HAUJ LWM NIROG COV SPECIALTY UNITS

- K-9 Unit
- Tactical Unit
- Harbor Patrol
- Mounted Patrol
- Motorcycle Unit

TSO NPE HNUB NO
Text to lus "Police Officer" mus rau
(414) 519-6190
kom tau txais ntau ib thawj tshab.

MILWAUKEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Radio Advertisements. The FPC has placed radio ads on the following stations: 96.5 FM Hometown Rick, Jammin' 98.3 FM, The Truth 101.7 FM, WLUM 102.1 FM, 102.9 FM the Hog, Kiss 103.7 FM, Pure Oldies 106.9 FM, and Joy 1340 AM/98.7 FM. In addition, the FPC and MPD have partnered with La GranD radio station to play a radio segment to better engage Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking community.

Your Brand on La Gran D

LA GRAN 104.7 FM
SPEAK TO MILWAUKEE HISPANIC HEART

iHeart RADIO

Jammin' 98.3 fm
Today's R&B and Old School

Radio Advertisement & Podcast

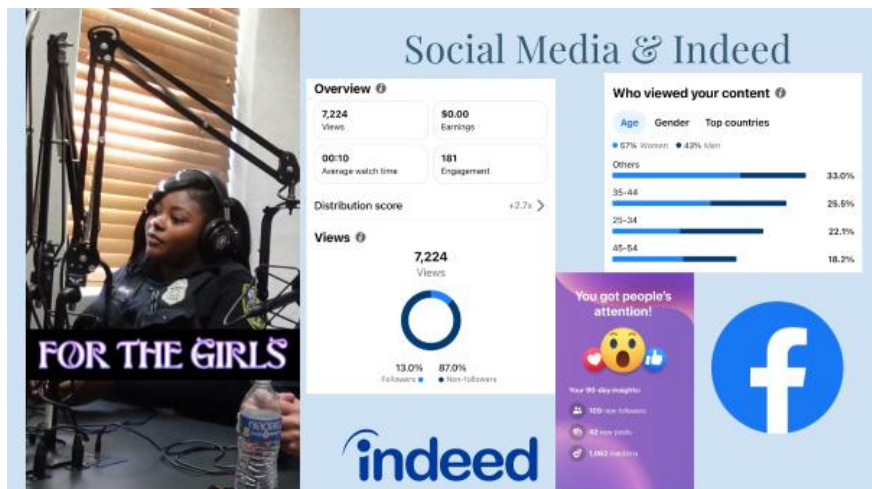
Bus Advertisements. During 2023-25, the FPC ran ad campaigns with the Milwaukee County Transit System where we placed ads on the side and back of city buses, with a primary focus on Northside and Southside routes.



Billboards. In the past, the FPC has also partnered with Clear Channel on billboard ad campaigns, with ads placed at strategic locations near high-traffic areas throughout the city.



Social Media & Job Sites. The FPC has worked with Sinclair Broadcasting Group on our police officer recruitment campaigns. The partnership included a mixture of targeted Facebook and Instagram ads in Milwaukee and its surrounding areas. In addition to the social media campaign conducted by Sinclair, FPC staff post updates on our recruitment efforts and community events on the FPC's Facebook page. We also publish the police officer posting on various job sites like Indeed and the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Network (WILENET).



Gas Station Ads. In 2024, the FPC partnered with GSTV, the station in charge of advertisements on gas station pump screens throughout Milwaukee. Officer testimonials were used for this advertisement campaign, which included 64 gas stations throughout the city. This helped

increase our visibility throughout the community, including during 2024's Republican National Convention (RNC).

MATC Ads. The FPC has also collaborated with **Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC)** to place print advertisements throughout its downtown campus.



Updated recruitment theme

An important part of recruiting for law enforcement officers is being able to pivot, adapt, and change in response to new information. To build and improve upon the recruitment efforts described above, members of the FPC's recruiting team conducted focus groups with police recruits graduating the academy to gain insight on how they heard about the police officer position, what made them want to become officers, and why they specifically chose the Milwaukee Police Department. The first focus group was conducted in the fall of 2023, while the second focus group was conducted in early 2024. The two focus groups included over 70 recruits who provided the FPC with valuable information to help tailor and create a new recruitment campaign theme.

The recruits indicated there were multiple avenues through which they learned that MPD was hiring. These included Indeed, social media, bus ads, career fairs, and radio. However, the overwhelming majority said they learned about the position through word-of-mouth. Although there was a good deal of variation in the recruits' prior experiences with police, a common theme was their desire to have a sense of purpose in their careers. They all wanted to do something that was greater than themselves and that offered a sense of fulfillment not often found in many other jobs. They were not looking for "just a job," they wanted a rewarding career, with good pay and benefits, and one that offered them an opportunity for growth. The reasons they expressed for choosing Milwaukee included serving the city and the community where they grew up, as well as MPD's size, diversity, and opportunities to advance and work in different specialty units.

As mentioned earlier, the FPC is not naïve regarding the current perceptions of police by many people in our community. See [FPC's 2024 Police Satisfaction Survey](#). Many people view police officers with suspicion or in a negative light. It is difficult for them to see and recognize police officers as normal people, who are just like anyone else. The way the community views the department and its officers, together with the information gathered from the focus groups and other research, played a pivotal role in developing and implementing the FPC's new recruitment campaign theme, *"More Than an Officer."*

"More Than an Officer" is a campaign designed to humanize officers and allow them to share their journeys and personal stories about what made them become police officers in the city of Milwaukee. We believe that showing the human side of our officers will help break down some of the misconceptions surrounding police, while also encouraging people who might never have considered this career to apply. With *"More Than an Officer,"* the FPC recruiters work with current MPD officers to share their testimonials and journeys to becoming sworn law enforcement officers. The campaign is centered around video recordings of true stories and focuses on highlighting the person in the uniform, rather than the uniform itself. Our goal is to show that MPD officers are more than officers—they are mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, neighbors, friends, and ordinary people with lives just like the rest of us. The only difference between us and them is that they have decided to take an oath to protect and serve our community and make it a better place.

This campaign is not meant to be a quick fix, or solve all the problems related to the decline in police satisfaction within our city. It is meant to humanize officers, give them an opportunity to share their stories, and highlight them in a positive way. The goal is to emphasize commonalities instead of differences, and help bridge the gap between officers and the community. Four of our officers' testimonials can be viewed by clicking on the links below:

- Officer Dominique Thompson: <https://youtu.be/E-o-ofjP4q8>
- Officer Theodore Chandler: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oYoYHPM7_0&t=5s
- Officer Alicia Walker: <https://youtu.be/gn7T4rl4ARU>
- Officer Raul Ornelas: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsJKeU62rtI&t=14>

Updated advertisement campaign

Beginning in 2023, the FPC greatly expanded its advertisement partnerships, more than tripling its overall expenditures from the previous year. In 2025, the FPC's budget for recruitment and advertising totaled approximately \$130k, the vast majority of which went for police officer recruitment. This year, our total recruitment and advertising budget totals approximately \$140k.²

² These figures do not include the additional funds allocated for our partnership with Safeguard Recruiting, discussed below.

Since expanding our advertising expenditures, the FPC has focused on identifying the success of various advertisement investments by tracking police officer application spikes, reviewing what applicants self-report about the ways they learned of the job posting, and conducting focus groups of new recruits. This year we will focus on avenues that yielded the highest return rates, as well as a few new opportunities.

Enhanced Bus Ad Campaign. As noted above, in previous years we have run campaigns with the Milwaukee County Transit System where we placed our ads on the side and back of city buses. During these periods, we have experienced a spike in police officer applications.

Due to the success we experienced with past bus advertisements, we have decided to continue using bus ads as a recruitment tool. However, instead of only deploying bus ads in Milwaukee, we have now expanded our efforts to include bus advertisements in Racine and Waukesha.

Having bus ads run in these locations will expand our reach and allow the ads to be seen in other areas like Caledonia, Mount Pleasant, Sturtevant, Brookfield, Hartland, and Oconomowoc. At various points throughout 2025 and 2026, we have and will continue to have buses going around Milwaukee, Waukesha, and Racine.



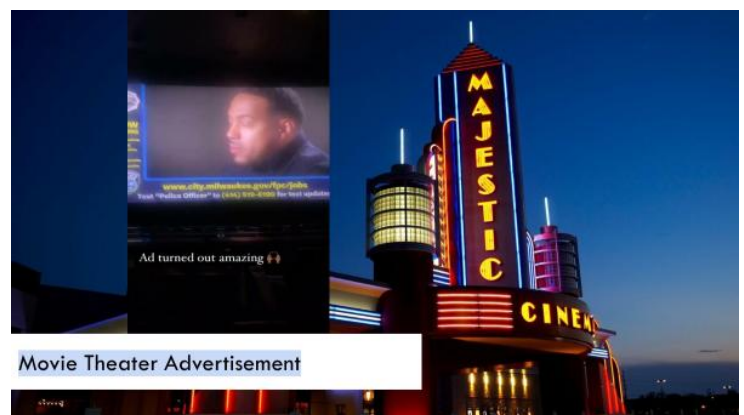
Job Sites. Postings on job sites like Indeed have consistently yielded positive results. Nearly 26% of qualified applicants in 2024 indicated that they had heard about the role through Indeed. In 2025, and again this year, we will not only be posting on Indeed for a set period of time, we will invest in the post for the entire year. It is not always about trying something new; Indeed has worked every year and we will continue to go with what works.

Podcasts. In the past, the FPC has run ads on podcast platforms with our partner IHeartMedia, which has received positive feedback. Podcasts allow us to better target our audience. We can target current job seekers, gym enthusiasts, military veterans, those interested in true crime, and more. In 2026, podcast ads will continue to be part of our recruitment strategy.

Social Media. Our social media campaigns will also continue year-round throughout 2026. These ads will highlight individual officers and their unique stories, as well as MPD's specialty units and opportunities for career growth, along with MPD's commitment to community

engagement. Social media will be an important part of our efforts to change the current landscape and narrative surrounding the law enforcement profession. Videos surface daily throughout the country of officers who do the wrong thing, and so often we are saturated with negative images of police officers that go viral. Unfortunately, this has led many to believe that all police officers are not good people. We will use our own social media presence to combat this stereotype and create different social media videos that are geared toward humanizing our officers, showing them in a positive light, and promoting unity and peace in our community. Social media allows us to create our own narrative and promote the positive side of the Milwaukee Police Department.

Other Unique Advertising Initiatives. Running advertisements in **shopping malls** and **movie theaters** is something that has been around for years. The FPC, however, tried mall ads for the first time in 2024. This new recruitment avenue led us to another recruitment opportunity with a news/radio station that saw our ads in Mayfair Mall and asked us to join their news segment to talk about police officer recruitment. In 2025, and again this year, we will again place ads in Mayfair around the holiday season, during which there is increased foot traffic. The same thing will be done at movie theaters. We know that a number of big blockbusters are released in the summer, so we will capitalize on that by placing ads at movie theaters during those months.



Beginning in 2024, FPC recruiters began using **recruitment cards** as a convenient handout to potential recruits. These cards were later provided to select MPD members to use in their recruitment efforts, as well.



Recruiting Consultant. In 2025, the FPC hired a consultant—Safeguard Recruiting—to assist us with recruitment strategy, marketing and branding, website design, and social media outreach. Safeguard is operated by former law enforcement professionals with over 80 years of combined experience. Its team employs a recruiting-first approach that has enabled its clients to overcome past frustrations with a marketing centric approach. Unlike other companies that promise impressions and views, Safeguard focuses on actual candidates and applicants.

The first phase of Safeguard’s work for Milwaukee included a digital/social media recruitment campaign, as well as an automated candidate nurturing campaign. Since Safeguard launched these campaigns in the fall of 2025, the FPC has approximately doubled the number of applications it has been receiving. For most of the first half of 2025, the FPC was averaging between 20 to 30 applications per week. Since Safeguard started, we have consistently been receiving nearly 50 applications per week, on average. Some of Safeguard’s recent print ads disseminated through social include the following:



The second phase of Safeguard's work included a new recruitment website and recruitment video for the Milwaukee Police Department, both of which launched in early February 2026. Both the website and the video are intended to promote the FPC's *More than an Officer* campaign, as well as the many benefits of working for MPD, like the department's specialty units. The video is available on the new website, which can be accessed at joinmilwaukeepd.com.

Maximizing Applicant Opportunities and Targeting All Potential Applicant Populations

The FPC is always looking for ways to target new applicant populations for the Milwaukee Police Department. A few of our recent efforts on this front include:

Continuous Recruitment. Like many police departments throughout the country, the city of Milwaukee has experienced a notable decline in the number of applicants looking to become police officers. In response, the FPC has opted to engage in a continuous recruitment model for recruiting police officers.

The FPC began conducting continuous recruitment for police officers in May 2023. The continuous recruitment model is designed to make the process more applicant-focused and applicant-friendly. This model allows candidates to apply year-round, rather than only during a limited application period of a few weeks, as we had historically done. This is designed to attract additional applicants and qualified candidates by providing them with more opportunities to apply year-round and reducing waiting periods.

In this model, passing exam results are valid through the end of the year, and applicants who do not pass a particular exam component are automatically re-invited to participate in the next testing cycle. Applicants can therefore try again without having to re-apply or retake prior exam components they have already passed.

Police Transfer/Lateral Recruitment. In September 2024, the city executed a memorandum of understanding with the Milwaukee Police Association (MPA) allowing the FPC for the first time to recruit and hire experienced police officers from other agencies at a salary step commensurate with their prior experience. Shortly thereafter, the FPC launched its first transfer/lateral police officer recruitment in November of 2024. This effort was intended to open up a new pool of applicants for MPD and attract new members with valuable experience. Four candidates joined MPD through this new opportunity in the fall of 2025.

In January 2026, the FPC launched a second lateral recruitment. The lateral candidates who apply during this round will be hired in August 2026.

MPD's 30x30 Initiative. Women make up less than 14% of sworn officers across the country. Currently, MPD's officer corps is comprised of only 15% women. MPD has therefore proudly joined the 30x30 Initiative, a coalition of police leaders, researchers, and professional organizations who have joined together to support and advance the representation, experiences, and well-being of women in policing agencies across the United States. Through efforts like targeted recruiting, promoting a supportive culture and work environment, adopting family-friendly policies, and eliminating barriers to promotions, MPD and the FPC are committed to increasing the representation of women in Milwaukee's police force.



CampHero. This ongoing initiative is a collaboration between Girl Scouts, MATC, FPC, and MPD, and the Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD). *CampHero* is a hands-on experience that introduces young girls to protective service careers. They explore interests and skills while participating in activities in the areas of law enforcement, fire suppression, and emergency medicine. Girl Scouts work alongside the professionals at MATC's Fire Academy (Oak Creek, WI) during the day and the girls spend nights sleeping indoors at Trefoil Oaks Program Center in Kenosha.



FPC Testing & Hiring Efforts

Improving and Modernizing the Testing Process

The FPC's efforts are not limited to recruitment but include the testing process, as well.

Updated Background Standards. For example, in 2022 the FPC Board adopted several significant updates to its background standards and procedures for new police officers. Prior to the adoption of the new standards, if an applicant had their driving privileges suspended or revoked for moving violations two or more times within the past five years, it would result in an automatic disqualification. Similarly, the use or possession of marijuana within the past two years was grounds for automatic disqualification. In 2022, the FPC Board eliminated both of these mandatory disqualifications from its background standards and procedures. While these factors can still be considered in assessing the totality of a candidate's background, they are no longer automatically disqualifying. These changes were adopted by the FPC Board with the hope of increasing the number of otherwise qualified candidates.

New Testing Vendor. In the summer of 2024, the FPC entered into a contract with a new testing vendor—National Testing Network (NTN). NTN is now the FPC’s exclusive testing vendor for police entry-level and promotional testing. NTN was selected through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process and began testing police officer candidates in September 2024.

Our goal in selecting NTN was, among other things, to remove barriers by creating a more candidate-friendly testing process, reduce the overall time the process takes, modernize our recruitment and testing methods, and expand and improve our recruitment efforts and reach. NTN offers the FPC new recruitment features and has a greater national reach than its prior testing vendor.

Online testing. A key benefit that NTN offers (which our prior vendor did not) is that they are able to facilitate and administer several components of the testing process (the written test, writing sample, and oral interview) in a virtual/online format. This means candidates no longer have to worry about finding a mode of transportation, taking time off work, arranging for child care, or adjusting their schedules to appear in person at the academy for these exams at specific times and dates. Instead, they are provided with a virtual link where they can complete the written test, writing sample, and oral exam during a variety of preselected dates and times. In cases where individuals might struggle with obtaining a reliable computer that meets the functional standards needed to take the exam virtually, or if they lack reliable internet connection, alternative facilities are still available for individuals to sign up and complete the exam in person, such as MATC and other facilities outside Milwaukee County. This is part of the FPC's effort to combat the largest testing "drop off point" in the testing process, which is the failure to show up for the initial written test.

These changes to the initial steps in the testing process will not only reduce some of the barriers we know applicants previously experienced, they will yield results much faster, reducing the overall time the testing process takes.

Increased Number of Preparation Sessions and Fit Camps. The addition of a second recruiter allows the FPC to conduct even more test prep sessions and fit camps. In partnership with the MPD, the FPC’s recruiters organize dozens of prep sessions and fit camps each year, allowing applicants to familiarize themselves with each stage of the testing process (written test, oral interview, physical readiness test) and prepare themselves to perform their best. Ongoing, regularly scheduled fit camps are particularly important for preparing candidates and helping them do their best on the PRT.

Keeping Candidates Informed and Engaged. The FPC strives to keep candidates informed and maintain contact through regular email and text message reminders to increase show rates for applications, events, and exams. Our recruiters use a texting software called SlickText to assist in recruitment and retention efforts. This texting system allows people to opt in and receive updates and alerts regarding any FPC job posting and also helps our recruiters communicate

with candidates and answer questions they may have regarding the testing process. The FPC is always sure to include a QR code in our printed and digital marketing materials so that potential applicants can easily opt-in to our SlickText system and receive text updates. SlickText is an excellent tool to recruit, retain, and engage candidates, and it has continued to show positive results.

The FPC's move to online testing has unfortunately resulted in a decrease in the amount of in-person contact we have with candidates throughout the testing process. To compensate for this, the FPC plans to begin holding monthly outreach events or office hours for candidates to attend (in addition to our ongoing fit camps). The first such event—*MKE Badge Bound*—was held on February 26, 2026, at MPD's training academy. This event was designed as a celebration for the candidates who had recently completed the testing process and have been appointed to MPD's Class 1-2026, which will start on March 30, 2026.

MKE Badge Bound was an opportunity for the candidates' families/support systems to celebrate their acceptance into the police academy. The events featured a brief program, with remarks from the Mayor, MPD, and FPC, photo ops, and signing of a pledge/commitment to MPD. Academy staff were also present to answer questions from recruits and their families, as not everyone's family necessarily understands the commitment their loved ones are making by entering this career. The program is also designed to help new recruits build connection and commitment with each other, MPD, and the Milwaukee community.

NTN Background Investigations. Starting in 2025, the FPC began using NTN to also conduct background investigations of police officer candidates. NTN background services provide the same thorough investigations and vetting of candidates that MPD previously provided, but at a much faster pace. NTN guarantees comprehensive, completed background reports within a 6-to-8-week turnaround time. This will speed up the overall time of the testing process by approximately two months.

Maintaining High Testing Standards

The FPC is committed to ensuring that the members of the Milwaukee Police Department meet the highest standards. Candidates are and will continue to be put through a rigorous testing and vetting process designed to make sure those who are hired to be police officers are intelligent, honest, and dedicated public servants well qualified for the critical role of keeping the public safe.

Written Test, Oral Interview, Writing Sample Exercise. The first step in the testing process is the written test. The FPC uses tests that are validated by an outside third party to measure aptitude for, and compatibility with, the position. The testing process is overseen by the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners, which is dedicated to building and maintaining a qualified and representative police force, and the testing is administered by an experienced and professional civilian staff.

Oral Board Interview & Writing Sample. Candidates who pass the written test are invited to participate in the oral board interview and writing sample. This component of the examination process is arranged and scheduled by FPC staff, but the panel members consist of former, current, and retired MPD personnel who have been properly trained by a third-party vendor to evaluate the interviews. Oral board interviews are a crucial step in assessing candidates' suitability for public safety roles, evaluating their communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and overall demeanor. Similarly, the writing sample exercise ensures candidates have ability to adequately communicate in writing.

Physical Ability Test. Candidates who pass the previous sections are invited to complete the physical readiness test (PRT). [The Wisconsin Law Enforcement Standards Board \(LESB\)](#) is the certifying authority in Wisconsin for police officers, and they set the standards for the PRT. See the following table for an overview of the standards:

Physical Readiness Test	Entrance to the Police Academy	Graduation from the Police Academy
1.5-mile run	20:20 minutes	16:57 minutes
300m run	82 seconds	68 seconds
Push-ups	18	23
Sit-ups	24	30
Vertical Jump	11.5 inches	14 inches
Agility Run	23.4 seconds	19.5 seconds

LESB has also produced a [video overview of the test](#).

Background Investigation. When we are ready to begin processing background investigations, applicants are asked to submit information for review. After a full investigation using the information provided, candidates are interviewed by an investigator. A key qualification for a police officer is honesty and integrity, so providing false, misleading, or incomplete information can lead to disqualification from the hiring process.

Eligible List. Candidates who successfully pass the examination process are placed on an eligible list for police officer, with ranking based upon the test scores plus any applicable preference points (see below).

Pre-employment Medical Examination, Psychological Evaluation, and Drug Test. Individuals offered employment must pass a pre-employment medical examination, psychological evaluation, and drug test as a condition of employment.

Appointments. Final appointment as a police officer is contingent upon passing all pre-employment components, the number of vacancies authorized to be filled, and approval by the FPC Board.

Preference Points. Preference points may be added to the final passing score in accordance with state statutes and [FPC Rules](#).

Residency Requirement. Within six months of being hired, police officers must comply with the city of Milwaukee's residency requirement for designated emergency personnel and must reside within 15 miles of the jurisdictional boundaries of the city.

Key Performances Indicators, Current Successes, and Future Goals

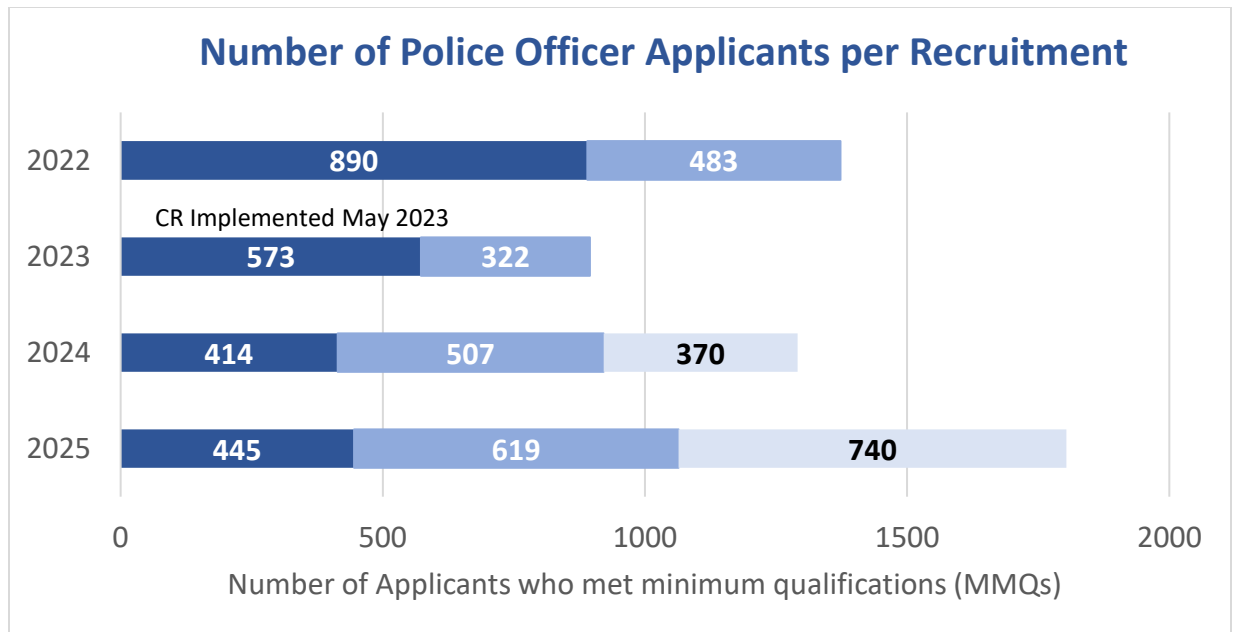
The FPC's key performance indicators (KPIs) include:

- The number of applicants recruited every 4 months and every year.
- The number of recruits hired per class.
- The overall hiring rate, that is, the percentage of applicants who are actually hired into the academy.

Again, police officer recruitment and hiring continues to be a nationwide challenge. Despite the challenging environment, the FPC's current recruitment efforts are already producing results that are as good as, or better than, many other similar jurisdictions.

For example, in 2024 the FPC recruited a total of 1,291 new police officer applicants who met the minimum qualifications. This amounted to approximately 27 new applications on average per week. In 2025, this figure grew to a total of 1,804 new applicants who meet the minimum qualifications.³ This amounted to an average of 39 new applications per week.

³ This figure is slightly higher than the total number of applicants shown in the chart of page 22. This is because the city's applicant tracking system excludes applicants who later withdraw from the process in calculating the number of applicants who meet the minimum qualifications (MMQs). The number of MMQs therefore changes slightly throughout the year.



Regarding hiring, the FPC appointed and hired 116 new police officer recruits in 2023. An additional 110 recruits were hired in 2024, and 114 in 2025.⁴ The overall hire rate from our 2023 recruitment was approximately 9%, and around 8% for our 2024 and 2025 recruitments.

The total number of law enforcement officers at MPD as of December 2025 was 1,575. This represents a decrease of over 300 officers from 2018, when MPD's sworn strength was around 1,900. As can be seen from the below chart, however, this decrease was largely due to the limited number and sizes of recruit classes that were funded between 2019 and 2021, not recruitment and hiring efforts since 2022.

Year	Recruit Class	Budgeted No.	Actual No. Appointed	Actual No. Graduated	%
2019	Class 1 - 2019	50	48	37	77%
2020	Class 1 - 2020	65	65	62	95%
2021	Class 1 - 2021	30	30	26	87%
2022	Class 1 - 2022	65	59	50	85%
	Class 2 - 2022	65	62	51	82%
2023	Class 1 - 2023	65	65	51	78%
	Class 2 - 2023	50	51	41	80%
2024	Class 1 - 2024	65	46	37	80%
	Class 2 - 2024	65	35	25	71%
	Class 3 - 2024	65	29	25	86%
2025	Class 1 - 2025	65	31	25	81%
	Class 2 - 2025	65	45	35	78%
	Class 3 - 2025	65	35	30*	-

* Currently remaining in the Academy

⁴ These figures include a handful of recruit reappointees and laterals, and thus do not exactly match the numbers on page 22.

Despite the relative success Milwaukee has experienced in recent years, the FPC believes we can and will do even better in the future. We are hopeful that our new initiatives (such as our contract with Safeguard Recruiting), together with our existing efforts, will allow us to increase the number of police officer applications the city receives. Our goal for 2026 is to see an increase in applications to a total of 2,000 or more during the year. In subsequent years, we are hopeful we can generate even more interest in the police officer position, as our new initiatives begin to bear even more fruit.

With respect to officer hiring, our ultimate goal is to hire 3 classes per year, each with 65 recruits. While this is a challenging goal we have set, it will be attainable in the near future if we can increase our hiring rate to around 9% or more. Our recent initiatives like online testing, private background investigations, and other efforts to reduce the time the testing process takes, are specifically designed to accomplish this goal.

Conclusion

In summary, the FPC—in partnership with the Milwaukee Police Department—has navigated significant challenges in recent years related to recruiting and staffing Milwaukee’s police force. These challenges underscore the importance of our collective responsibility for ensuring that the Milwaukee Police Department is fully staffed with the very best police officers. While we are proud of our work on this front to date, we know there is more work that lies ahead. We look forward to building on our momentum and progress to realize even greater success in the coming years.

3/17/2025

(updated 8/6/25 & 2/27/26)