



PSO Perspective

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Professional Staff: Job Satisfaction and the Impact on Police Staffing

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Policing is widely regarded as a public safety activity conducted by sworn officers. While civilians have historically had a significant role in policing, they have not been fully embraced as a solution to staffing challenges, nor has their job satisfaction been a concern for many agencies. Using the New York City Police Department (NYPD) as an example, this *PSO Perspective* considers ways to improve the workplace for civilians, allowing for better integration and opportunities to address staffing challenges.

Civilian Workforce

According to the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), in 2020, civilians accounted for a third of the over one million full-time personnel in state and local law enforcement agencies, a percentage that hasn't changed much over the past twenty years. The percentage of civilian personnel across types and sizes of agencies varies greatly, with sheriff's departments employing the most.

Of note, various terms - civilian, non-sworn, professional staff - describe police personnel who are not sworn employees. While "professional staff" is preferred, "civilians" is used interchangeably here.

Benefits and Challenges

Several publications, including [PERF's Critical Issues Embracing Civilianization report](#), [Police Chief Ideas and Insights: Research on Civilians in Policing](#), and [Police Chief Professional Staff](#), have described the benefits of professional staff and how agencies utilize and integrate them.

The benefits of professional staff include lower costs and a lower burden on sworn officers and individuals with specialized backgrounds. Various challenges, including internal and external resistance and cultural issues, can impact an

agency's ability to hire, support, and retain civilian staff.

When civilians and sworn officers do not understand or appreciate their varying roles, they do not work well together, which impacts morale, efficiency, and opportunities for innovation.

Supporting Civilians at the NYPD

The NYPD has over 16,000 civilian employees (≈30% of the workforce). With nearly 200 titles, many serve as school safety agents, traffic enforcement agents, and call dispatchers. Most are city residents, and most are women and black or Hispanic (see NYPD [Demographics](#)).

At the NYPD, we worked closely with the [Advancement of Civilian Employees Society \(ACES\)](#) to understand and address issues of professional staff. We reviewed historical information and conducted surveys and focus groups. The following concerns were paramount:

- Lower salary, fewer benefits, and less job security than sworn officers.
- Sworn officers lack awareness regarding civilian titles and rank structure.
- Insufficient training and opportunities for professional development.

- Lack of inclusion in department engagement efforts and programs.
- Variation in pay scales across civilian titles, leading to pay equity issues.
- Disconnect between sworn officers and civilians.
- Lack of promotional and advancement opportunities.
- Differences in overtime across titles.
- Ensured department leadership, civilian unions, and city managers were aware of concerns and the cost of cyclical civilianization efforts.

Conclusion

Professional staff serve in many capacities and should be considered a critical and valued part of an agency's workforce. Leaders must ensure all employees are included in engagement and organizational change efforts to understand issues specific to professional staff better.

Several things can be done to address job satisfaction for civilians. Agencies that focus on the well-being of all employees will be better positioned to support and integrate professional staff into their workforce, which will ultimately impact police agencies' staffing challenges.

The NYPD did several things to address concerns.

- Created a [Civilian History of the NYPD](#) guide and a recruit curriculum to provide awareness of civilian titles for sworn officers.
- Provided clarity around [civilian executive titles in department policy](#).
- Revamped and provided clarity on the Civilian Advancement Committee.
- Instituted a pay parity working group to examine differences in pay across and between titles.
- Reviewed all training and professional development opportunities and created new curriculum and courses specific to civilians.
- Ensured civilians were considered when designing and implementing new programs (e.g., peer support, recognition program).

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About the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory

The [Police Staffing Observatory \(PSO\)](#) is a global collaborative of academics, scholars, practitioners, and students working with Michigan State University to promote evidence-based police workforce research, strategy, and operations. It aims to advance police workforce knowledge and its application through research and dissemination, including practitioner partnerships.