NEOGOV



THE *Hiring Crisis* IN PUBLIC SAFETY

2023 REPORT



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THE HIRING & RETENTION CRISIS

Public safety agencies are facing an unprecedented hiring and retention crisis. You've seen it firsthand – first responders leaving for other industries and retiring earlier than planned, resulting in burnout, overtime pay, and reduction in services. But it's another thing entirely to look at the data and realize **these problems won't go away on their own.**

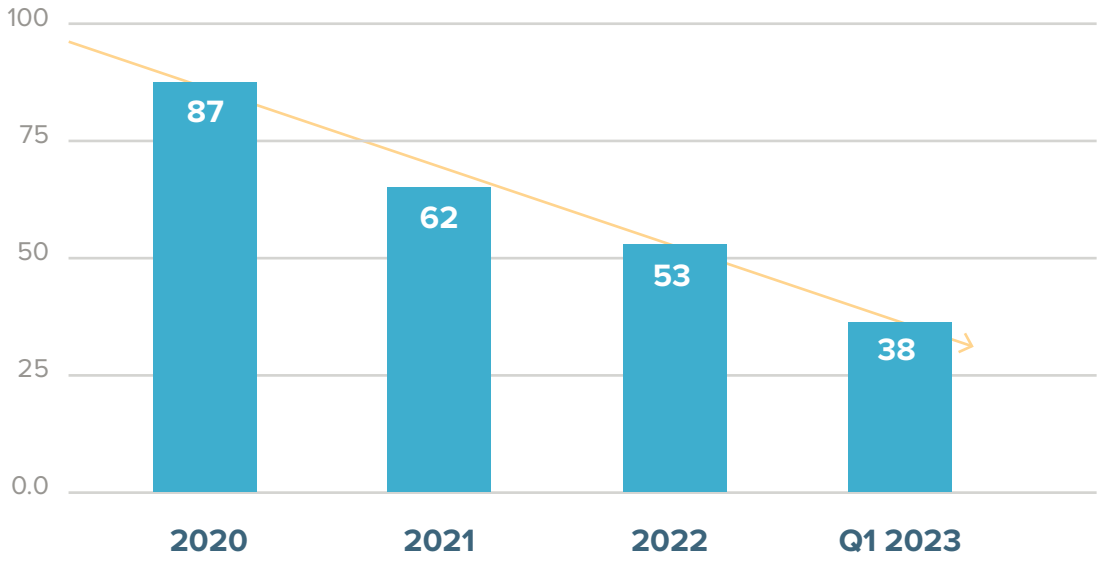
An analysis of 4M+ applications on NEOGOV's Insight (an applicant tracking system) highlights this troubling trend.

In 2022 there was a 17% increase in job openings but a 15% decrease in applicants per job compared to 2021. Fortunately, data from 2023 looks slightly more optimistic. In Q1 of this year, the number of applicants per job increased by 4% compared to Q1 of 2022.

Figure 1

Number of Applicants Per Open Job

Source: 2020-Q12023 data from 4M+ applications in insight



Looking at the trend since 2020, we see a 56% decrease in applications per job. How can agencies reverse the trend? It starts by making public safety jobs more attractive.

With mounting challenges like staff shortages, burnout, adverse media scrutiny, and more, first responders may perceive the personal toll of serving their communities as too high a cost. While you can't singlehandedly alter the national narrative, you can make your agency a more appealing environment to work in. Over time, this can impact the local and regional narrative.



THE PUBLIC SAFETY JOB MARKET

The public safety sector is caught in a cycle of turnover and burnout. First responders work harder and longer to compensate for staff shortages. Over time they burn out and leave the agency, often earlier than planned.

This negative cycle has brought public safety to where it is today, and it can be summed up in four words: more openings, less applications. **Public safety job openings reached a new peak in 2022, reflecting a 49% increase since 2020.** Meanwhile, the number of applications has decreased by 9% and remained stagnant for two years.

The negative cycle becomes more apparent when splitting the data into quartiles. The bottom 25% of job postings only received 3 applications per open role. These applicants may not even meet the minimum requirements, so it's possible these job postings didn't have a single qualified candidate apply.

Quartile data also shows that 50% of jobs only received 6.5 applications on average. Meanwhile, the top 25% of jobs received 117 applications. **Which of your jobs are in the bottom 50%? Let's look at the hardest jobs to fill in public safety.**

Figure 2

Jobs & Applications Compared to 2020

Source: 2020–2022 application data from 4M+ applications in Insight

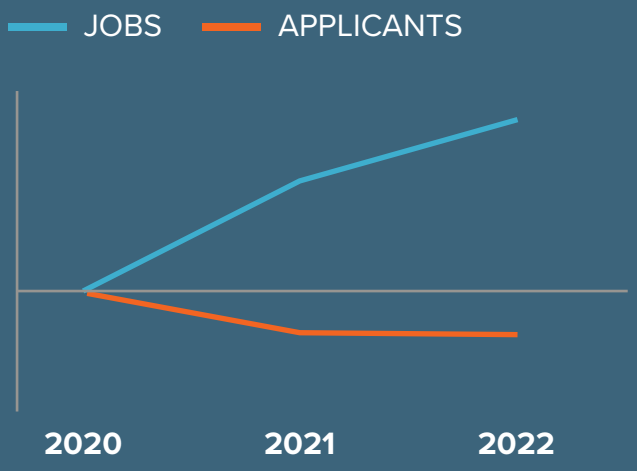
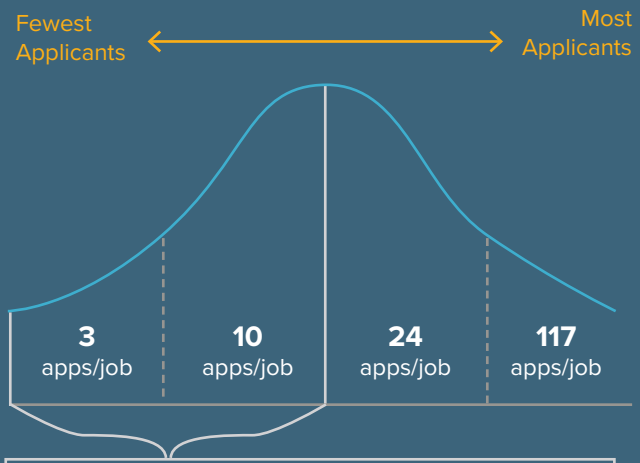


Figure 3

Average Applications Per Job by Quartile

Source: Q12023 data from 4M+ applications in Insight



50% OF JOBS GET AN AVERAGE OF **6.5 APPLICANTS / JOB**

THE HARDEST JOBS TO FILL

Public safety jobs are harder to fill than ever before. Between staffing shortages, high rates of burnout, and negative media attention, first responders have been retiring early or transitioning to the private sector. **Let's explore which public safety jobs are the most attractive to job seekers, and which ones are the hardest to fill.** With these data insights, you can identify where to focus recruitment efforts.

The job data in Figures 4–7 is based on job categories and job titles from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). View this page to learn more. The data itself comes from 22k+ jobs and 1.2M applications in Insight, NEOGOV's applicant tracking system.



APPLICATIONS PER JOB

Agencies need to find ways to appeal to first responders – supervisors in particular. Public safety jobs nationwide receive an average of 38 applications. But five jobs perform below average, and closer examination reveals why.

The three lowest jobs receive 53–61% less applications than the average. It's a serious disparity. What do they have in common? They are all supervisor roles:

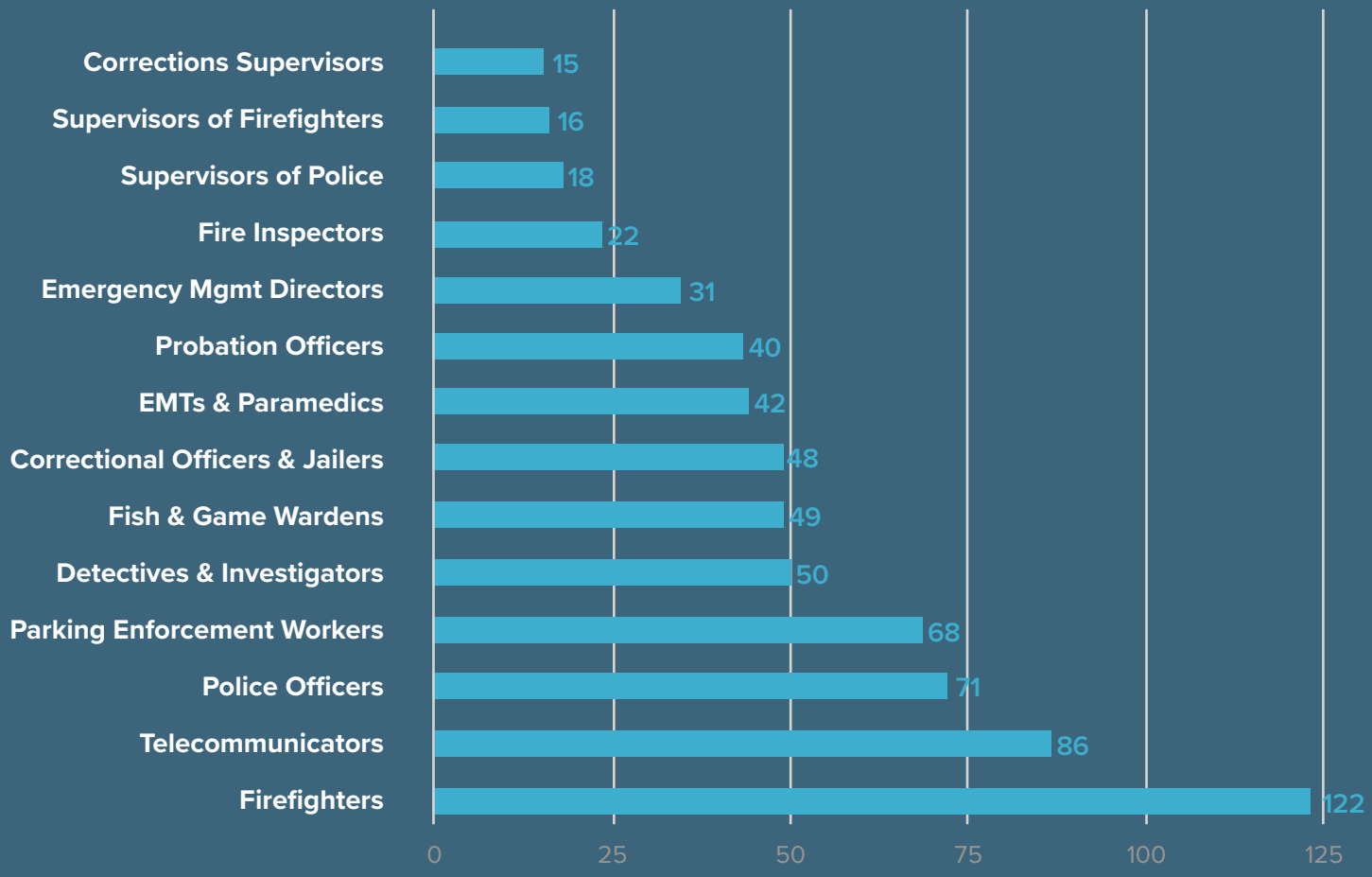
- Supervisors of Correctional Officers – 15 apps/job
- Supervisors of Firefighters –16 apps/job
- Supervisors of Police & Detectives – 18 apps/job

If we include Emergency Management Directors (31 apps/job), then **four of the five hardest-to-fill jobs are supervisor roles.** This makes sense. Given the expertise required for these jobs, agency leaders are the most equipped to find work in the private sector. According to the data, that's exactly what they're doing.

Figure 4

Public Safety Applicants Per Job

Source: 2022 data from 1.2M applications in Insight



DECLINE IN EVERY JOB CATEGORY

Leadership roles may be the hardest to fill, but other public safety jobs experienced a much steeper decrease from year to year.

Between 2021 and 2022, applications per job dropped in every single category. Such a widespread decrease in applicants has dire implications – first responders are looking elsewhere for jobs. **But even more concerning is the drop off in three categories that, combined, make up 52% of public safety jobs.**

Figure 5

Decline in the Most Prevalent Public Safety Jobs

Source: 2022 & 2021 data from 22k jobs and 2.4M applications in Insight

Job Categories	Percent of Public Safety Jobs	Decrease in Applicants/Job
Probation Officers	10%	-25%
Correctional Officers & Jailers	15%	-20%
Police Officers	27%	-18%
Total	**52%**	—

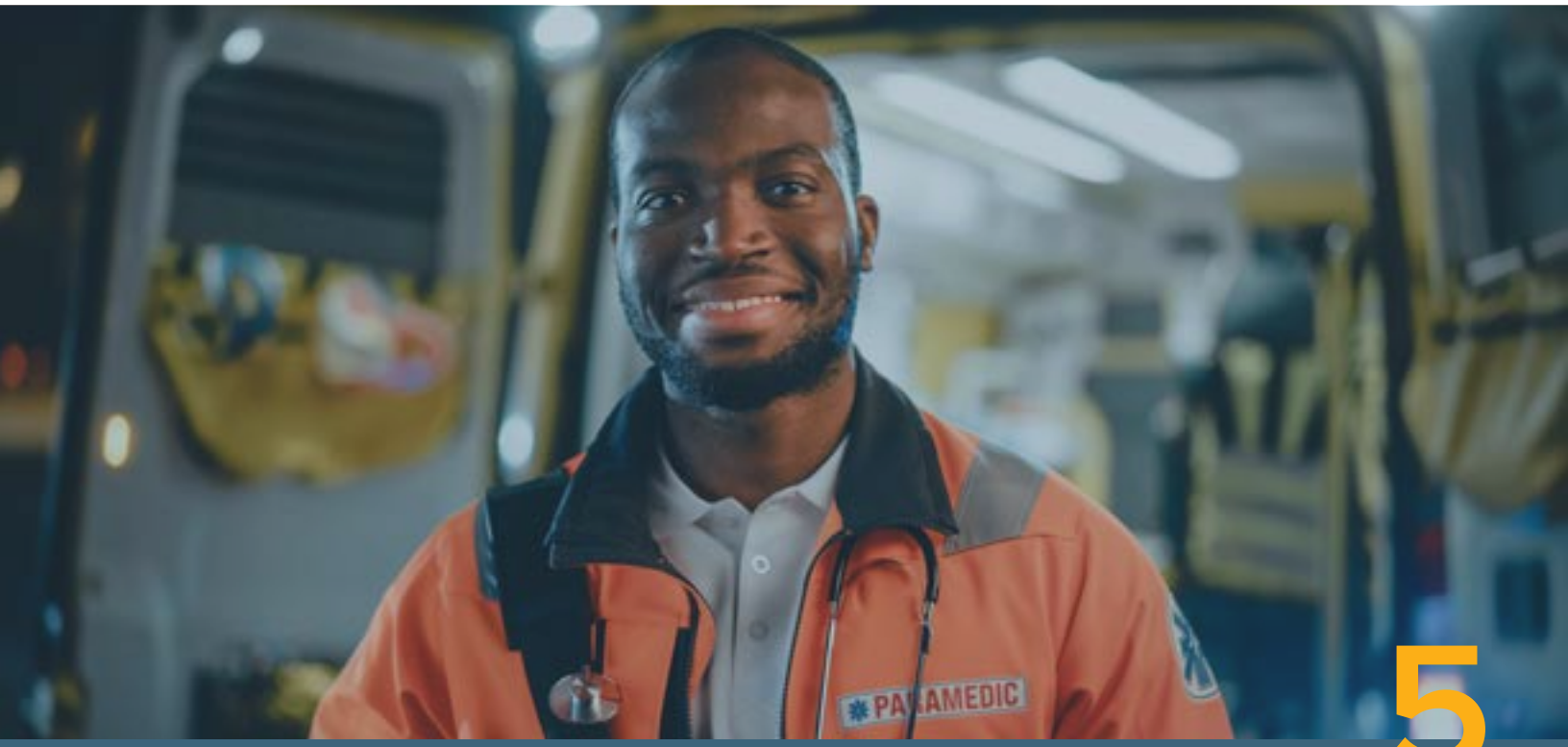
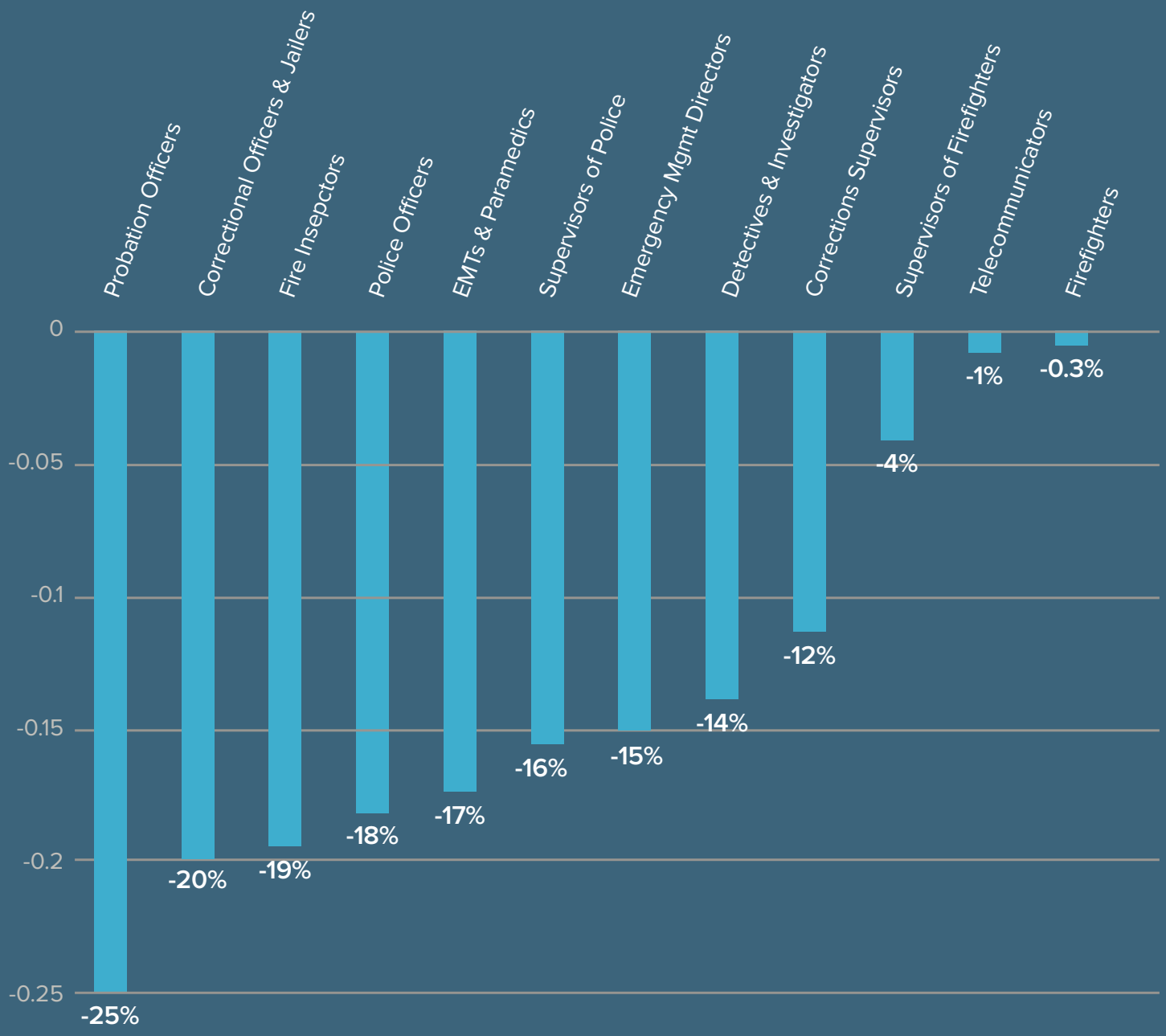


Figure 6

Percent Decrease of Applications Per Job: 2021 to 2022

Source: 2022 & 2021 data from 2.4M applications in Insight



Are you ready to fill these hard-to-hire jobs with top talent?

Your agency can start reversing the downward trend today, but it doesn't begin with you. It starts by understanding your job seekers and how to appeal to them.

HOW TO REVERSE THE TREND

Attracting top talent starts with understanding what candidates actually want, providing it, and then promoting it. Let's explore some best practices that can help you break the cycle of burnout and turnover at your agency.

EXPAND CANDIDATE SOURCING

To source candidates effectively, you need to know where first responders look for new jobs. The maxim is simple: go where they go and build a brand presence there. By investing resources in these popular channels, you can maximize your return.

- Post your jobs on the leading online job boards like GovernmentJobs.com, Indeed, etc.
- Build a presence on LinkedIn that highlights work culture and shares job openings.
- Create an easy-to-navigate career page. Write content that excites candidates to work for your agency.
- Reach out to passive candidates – those not actively searching on job boards. With tools like Attract, NEOGOV's candidate relationship manager, you can automatically or manually invite past candidates to apply for new job openings.

INCREASE JOB APPEAL

Conduct candidate interviews, anonymous employee surveys, and exit interviews to better understand what employees and candidates care about. By promoting what they care about, you can better attract top talent. To do so, start highlighting these factors on your career page and job descriptions: benefits, job security, meaningful work, and work-life balance.

Job descriptions should showcase your agency culture, values, and mission, so potential candidates know how they can contribute and thrive. Highlighting growth and advancement opportunities helps candidates imagine their future with your agency.

IMPROVE THE HIRING PROCESS

Create a positive experience for candidates in your talent pipeline by improving the application process, communication, and hiring timeline. Here are four ways to get started:

- Respond to job seekers within 2–4 weeks of their application submission.
- Provide honest feedback to applicants if they're not selected so they can become a more successful candidate for you in the future.
- Remember talented applicants for future vacancies if they're not qualified for the current job posting.
- Post jobs on GovernmentJobs.com and other online job boards that simplify the job search and application process for candidates.



LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

Increase agency productivity with the right tools. New software comes with a cost, but the returns far outweigh the investment.

Source, attract, and hire qualified candidates more effectively with NEOGOV's Insight (applicant tracking system) and Attract (candidate relationship manager). **Schedule a call today** to learn how NEOGOV's recruitment software can help your agency.

Collect information on hundreds of applicants in seconds. Save time screening candidates and find qualified employees faster with the new PowerEngage candidate pre-screening tool.

PowerDMS by NEOGOV serves public safety agencies with a workforce management platform. With solutions for training, shift scheduling, community engagement, policy compliance management, and more, PowerDMS helps you save time and resources. Ready to accomplish more with less? Sign up for a no-obligation call today.

7,000+
Public Sector Agencies

500,000+
People Use PowerDMS

20+
Years of Experience

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APPENDIX:
MOST PREVALENT JOBS IN PUBLIC SAFETY

Police Officers, Correctional Officers, Telecommunicators, and Probation Officers are the most common positions, making up 63% of all public safety jobs.

Figure 7

Most Common Jobs in Public Safety

Source: 2022 data from 22k public safety jobs in Insight

