
2024 REPORT

TOP 5

PUBLIC SAFETY

WORKFORCE TRENDS

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WELCOME

The 2024 Trends Report explores the most impactful opportunities for public safety leaders in 2024. This data-filled report reveals how your peers are prioritizing and tackling key trends. Leverage these insights to benchmark your workforce efforts, fuel decision-making, and refine strategic priorities for a successful 2024.

Who We Surveyed

Filled with valuable insights gathered from 349 survey respondents, this report reflects the trends, challenges, and opportunities within public safety workforce management. Respondents included lieutenants, managers, captains, police chiefs, deputies, and directors from public safety agencies across the United States.

Most respondents work in law enforcement (75%), while some work in emergency communications (15%), corrections (4%), EMS (3%), fire and EMS (1.5%), and fire (1%). The survey was conducted in November 2023.



Top Workforce Related Priorities in 2024

Public safety agencies are currently in a talent tug-of-war, each determined to hold onto their most scarce resource: their people. Going into 2024, retention and recruiting top the list of priorities for agencies struggling with severe understaffing and employee churn.

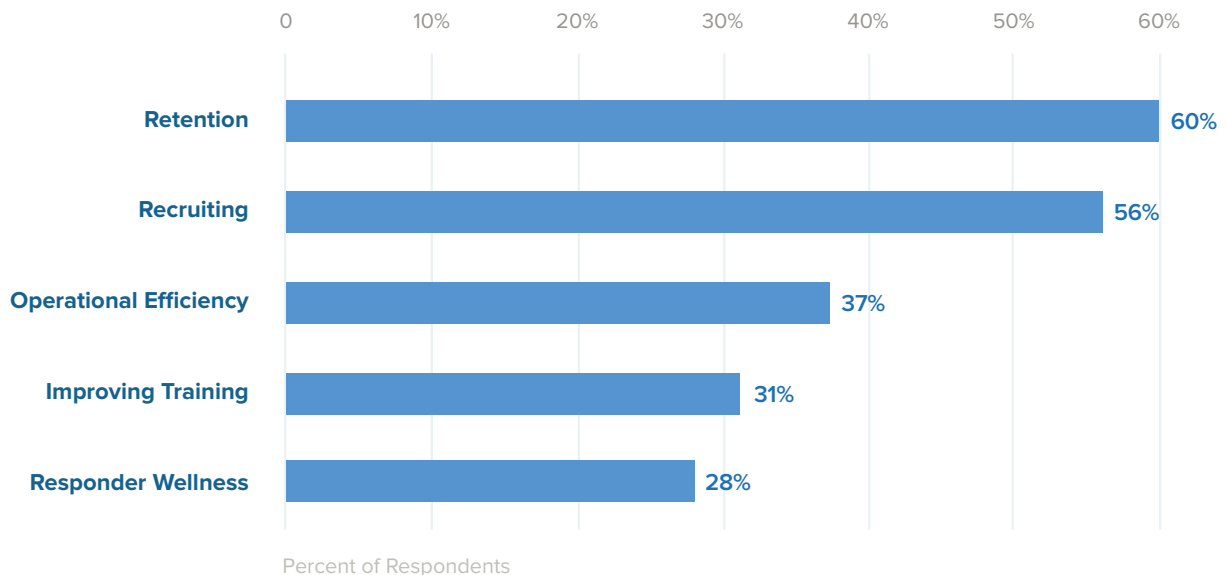


Key Takeaways

Agencies are diligently working to break the burnout cycle with targeted recruitment and retention strategies. Staffing shortages are straining overworked employees, creating inefficiencies, forcing early retirements, and impacting public safety.

Despite these challenges, agencies are prioritizing responder wellness, investing in employee training, and trying new strategies to attract talent and widen the candidate pool. Keep reading to explore these public safety trends and opportunities in more detail.

Figure 1
Top 5 Priorities for Public Safety HR in 2024
Source: NEOGOV 2023 survey results



1

TREND #1: AGENCIES SPARRING FOR QUALIFIED CANDIDATES

Public safety agencies are struggling to recruit – and retain – qualified candidates. Over the last several years, candidate pools have been shrinking as fewer people heed the call to serve in public safety.

It's no surprise, then, that finding qualified candidates is the top recruitment challenge for **86% of public safety agencies**.

With fewer qualified candidates available, most agencies (60%) are targeting their recruitment efforts on candidates from other agencies.

This strategy seems to be working. According to survey data, the top reason why responders leave is to go work for another agency. Public safety agencies are caught in a vicious cycle of recruiting and losing qualified candidates, signaling the need for well-rounded retention strategies.

Why are responders leaving for other agencies?

Pay increases, large signing bonuses, and other financial incentives are primary reasons why employees switch agencies, but simple factors, such as flexible facial hair or lenient tattoo policies, are reason enough for some responders. Agencies without residency requirements may also be attractive for many candidates who can't uproot and move in this challenging market.

Responders looking for advancement opportunities are particularly attracted to agencies that allow lateral transfers to move directly into specialty units. Responders also seek out agencies that prioritize bottom-up leadership cultures, rather than top-down approaches.

Understanding why responders are choosing to leave is a critical first step to develop effective retention strategies. Agencies can conduct exit interviews and harness those insights to revise internal policies and processes, especially those placing restrictions on facial hair, tattoos, and residency location.



2

TREND #2: CRITICAL LEVELS OF UNDERSTAFFING

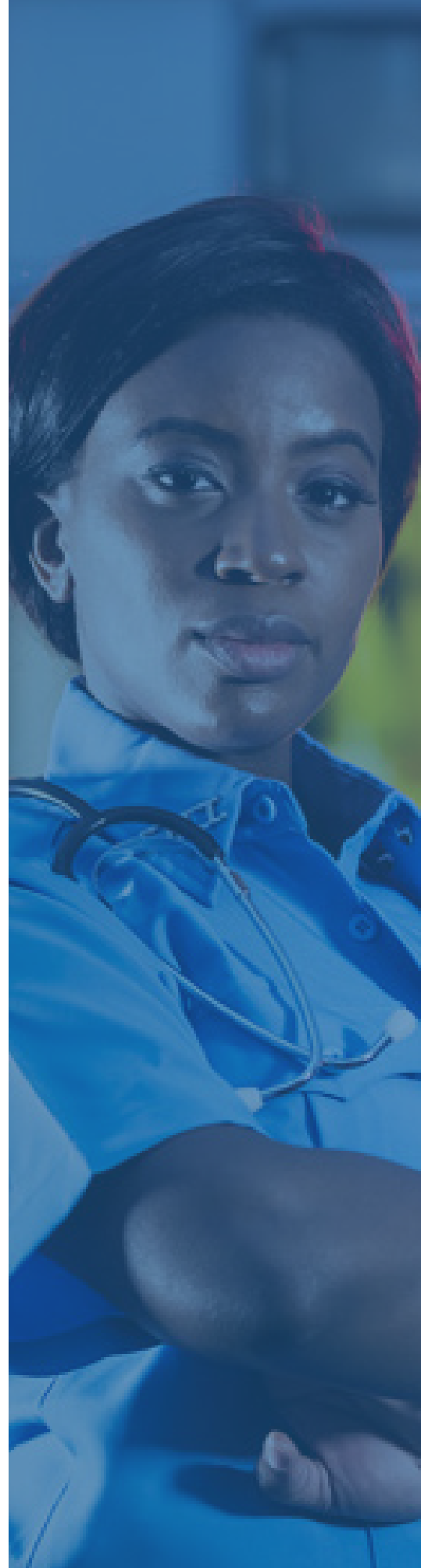
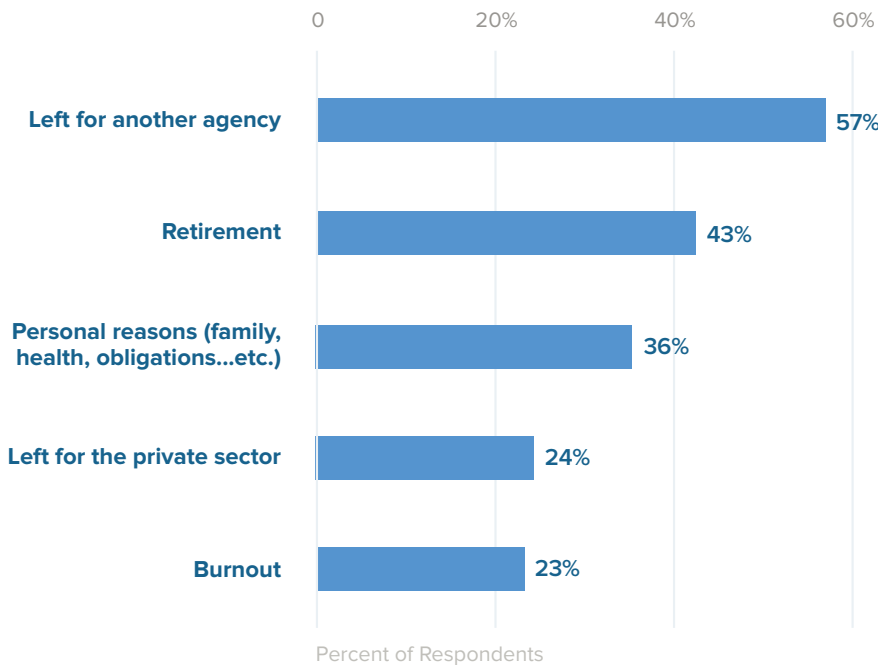
Across the country, public safety agencies are reeling from the impacts of understaffing. **80% of survey respondents are experiencing staffing shortages, with the majority indicating that low staffing levels will continue for up to 5 more years.** For most agencies, 6-10% of their open positions are unfilled.

Small candidate pools and high turnover rates are primary drivers of staffing shortages in public safety. According to our survey data, leaving to work for other agencies is the primary reason why employees leave an agency. Employees retiring, leaving for personal reasons, and escaping burnout are additional reasons for turnover.

Agencies are caught in a vicious burnout cycle. Employee turnover causes staffing shortages, which contributes to burnout, and ultimately turnover. Breaking the cycle requires a combination of targeted recruitment and well-rounded retention strategies, both of which are discussed in detail later in this report.

Staffing shortages are driving responders away.

Figure 2
Top Reasons for Employee Turnover in 2022 and 2023
Source: NEOGOV 2023 survey results



Impact of Staffing Shortages

The impact of understaffing on public safety agencies is severe. The primary impact of staffing shortages is an increase in overtime hours (79%). Respondents also report a decrease in responder morale (71%) and impacts to service delivery as a result of understaffing.

Increased Overtime

With fewer responders available, working overtime is inevitable. To ensure public safety, agencies must provide adequate shift coverage. Unfortunately, agencies are struggling to fill overtime shifts, primarily because younger responders are less willing to work overtime compared to past generations.

Younger workers are entering their public safety career expecting a work-life balance, and are reluctant to sacrifice personal time to work overtime. As a result, many agencies are having to create entirely new schedules to assign shifts previously filled with overtime.

Burnout and Early Retirement

Agencies are also experiencing higher burnout rates among younger workers. In general, younger workers cannot tolerate working long hours as well as previous generations, which is causing them to burn out more quickly.

Demanding overtime hours also impacts older workers. Working long hours is not sustainable for most people, but especially older workers nearing retirement. Many are simply opting into early retirement instead of enduring several more years of tedious overtime work.

Reduction in Police Services and Lower Response Time

The shockwaves of staffing shortages in public safety extend beyond overworked responders into the community. 40% of respondents report a reduction in proactive community policing efforts as a result of understaffing. Another 28% are experiencing increased response times.

To combat some of the effects of understaffing, public safety agencies can leverage technology to do more with less. Technology automates manual processes that contribute to working overtime, while improving morale and reducing overtime costs.

Planning for Retirement

With the Silver Tsunami in full effect and public safety officers retiring early, retirement is high on the list of reasons for employee turnover. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, all Baby Boomers will reach retirement age by 2030. It's estimated that nearly 10,000 Boomers reach retirement age every day.

In our survey, most public safety agencies say 5-10% of their employees will retire within the next 5-10 years, but a quarter of respondents will retire between 11-20% of their employees in the same time frame.

While most respondents have succession plans in place to capture critical knowledge before employees retire, nearly 30% do not. A strong succession strategy ushers in a younger generation of responders equipped with institutional knowledge to lead the organization into the future.





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TREND #3: RECRUITING A YOUNGER GENERATION OF RESPONDERS

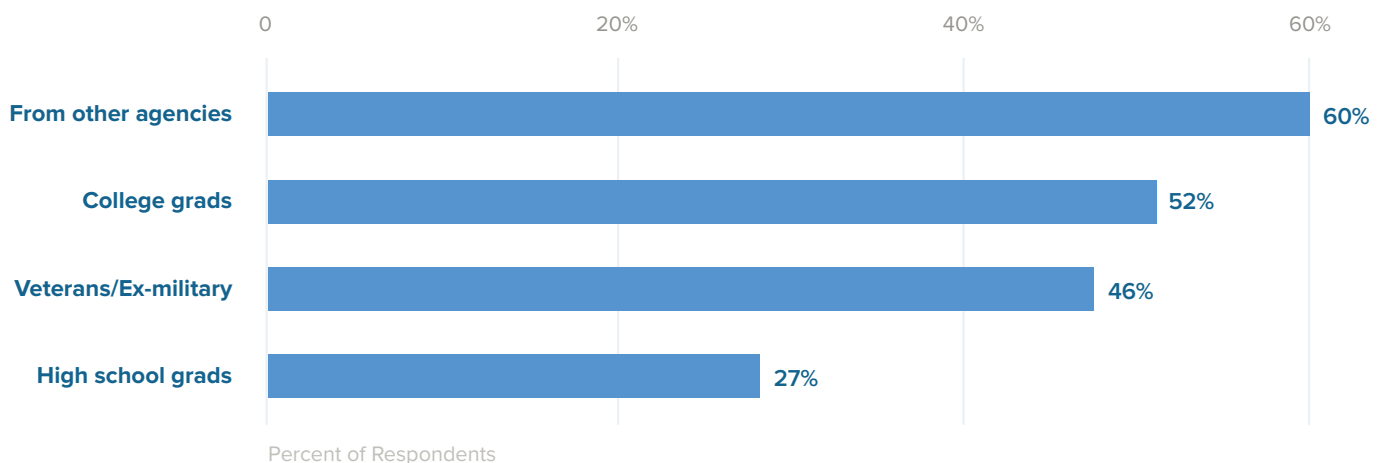
Finding qualified candidates (86%) and offering competitive salaries (51%) are the top recruitment challenges for public safety agencies. Respondents also say misconceptions about the job (26%) and a lack of flexibility (13%) make it challenging to recruit some candidates, especially younger workers.

Besides recruiting candidates from other agencies, public safety agencies are targeting college (52%) and high school graduates (28%), particularly athletes. Recruiting younger candidates is an opportunity

for agencies to educate them on the realities of the job, which helps reduce misconceptions and unmet expectations among young recruits.

Another opportunity is to recruit young candidates into police service aide positions. Police service aides respond to calls for service not in-progress, conduct interviews, interact with citizens, and prepare police reports. These part-time roles acclimate young responders to the role, while providing much needed support to understaffed agencies.

Figure 3
Recruiting Specific Groups in 2024
Source: NEOGOV 2023 survey results



Recruiting Strategies

Although agencies may continue to poach qualified candidates from other agencies, there are other strategies to consider. Recruiting new people into the industry can widen the candidate pool and alleviate the impacts of turnover.

However, recruiting young responders requires different strategies than in the past. New generations value flexibility, generous pay, and work-life balance – with an emphasis on personal time. Young recruits also want a clear vision of their future and valuable opportunities for career growth and development.

While certain aspects of public safety jobs cannot change, there are ways to incentivize young recruits into this noble profession.

Financial Incentives

Pay is a strong recruiting factor, especially for college graduates who invest time in higher education and may have student loans. Survey respondents are using tuition reimbursements (44%) and signing bonuses (30%) as incentives to fill job openings.

Remove Residency Requirements

Candidates are on the hunt for flexible work arrangements. By removing residency requirements,

the candidate pool instantly grows. Additionally, moving is not an option for many candidates in this challenging housing market, so agencies with lenient resident requirements are attractive to many.

Offer Set Schedules

Set schedules appeal to many responders. Having a predictable work schedule gives officers agency over their personal lives, which promotes a better work-life balance. Nearly a quarter of respondents are offering set schedules to help recruit the next generation of responders who want control over their time.

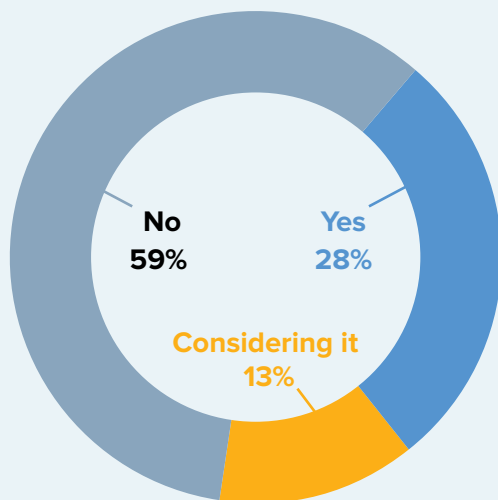
Loosening Facial Hair Requirements

Loosening candidate requirements is a popular strategy for agencies looking for a competitive advantage. Close to 40% of survey respondents have either loosened candidate requirements or are considering it. Most agencies with looser requirements are removing restrictions on facial hair and tattoos. Seemingly small policies like these are often deal breakers for younger candidates and military veterans who often sport tattoos. Removing these restrictions widens the pool of qualified candidates who are otherwise disqualified.

Figure 4

Loosening Minimum Candidate Qualifications

Source: NEOGOV 2023 survey results

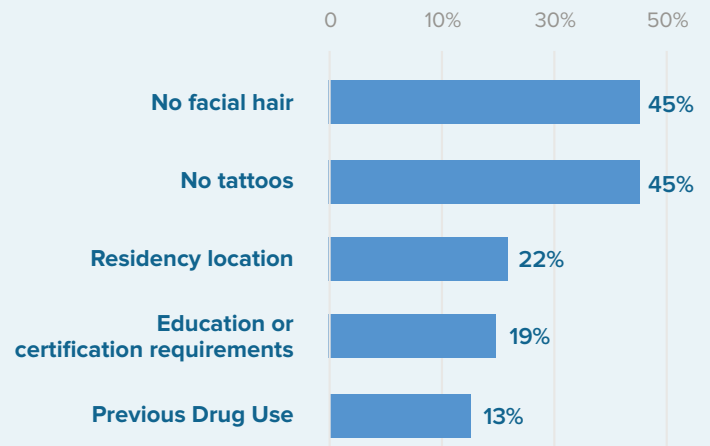


Percent of Respondents

Figure 5

Loosening Minimum Candidate Qualifications – Of Respondents that Answered Yes

Source: NEOGOV 2023 survey results



Percent of Respondents

Recruitment Marketing

Most respondents have a marketing strategy or are in the process of developing one, but 38% of agencies do not use a marketing strategy to assist with recruitment. Here are some ideas to incorporate into your recruitment marketing strategy:

- Host community events, like 'Shop with a Cop' during the holidays
- Promote positive citizen feedback on social media
- Distribute promotional flyers expressing strong agency culture
- Use flying banners to promote the agency over big events
- Air local commercials or radio ads
- Use Google Ads to target areas where officers are being laid off
- Educate the public about open roles at community engagement events or in citizen surveys





4

TREND #4: WELL-ROUNDED RETENTION STRATEGIES

Employee training and wellness are taking center stage in 2024. Agencies are looking to interrupt the vicious burnout cycle and boost retention by prioritizing employee wellness and training.

The demands of public safety jobs take a toll on responders, both physically and mentally, so offering supportive resources is critical to boost morale, stop burnout, and prevent tragic health consequences from occurring.

Community Engagement and Recognition

When agencies forge strong relationships with the communities they serve, everyone benefits. In a time when the public safety industry is highly scrutinized, it's easy for officers to withdraw from the community and feel unmotivated to perform at a high level. This can quickly lead to low morale, turnover, understaffing, and ultimately burnout.

Agencies can strengthen community relationships by keeping citizens informed, sharing positive citizen feedback with responders, and getting more

involved in the community. Doing so increases officer morale, makes them feel valued, and ultimately improves retention.

Intentional Training Programs

Training beyond the academy forges a special camaraderie among responders that's critical to rely on in the line of duty. Encouraging these important connections is important for the safety of both officers and the community.

For new hires, training provides early mentorship opportunities and sets clear expectations for their future. Each time an employee is promoted or transferred is an opportunity for employee engagement, leadership development, and skills training – all of which improve retention.

When asked if they offer formal, documented training, most agencies indicate they offer training for both promotions and lateral moves (55%). Some offer training only for promotions, but not lateral moves (24%), and 16% of agencies do not offer any type of training for when a responder is moved or promoted.

Health and Wellness Benefits

Responders work in challenging conditions and put their lives at risk every day. Over time, this takes a toll on their mental and physical health. **Studies** show that officers are 25 times more likely to die from a heart attack than they are in the line of duty. In another **study**, telecommunicators had a 50% higher obesity rate than the general population.

Rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are **alarmingly high** among first responders, as 1 in 3 will develop PTSD. And tragically, law enforcement officers and firefighters are **more likely to die by suicide** than they are on duty.

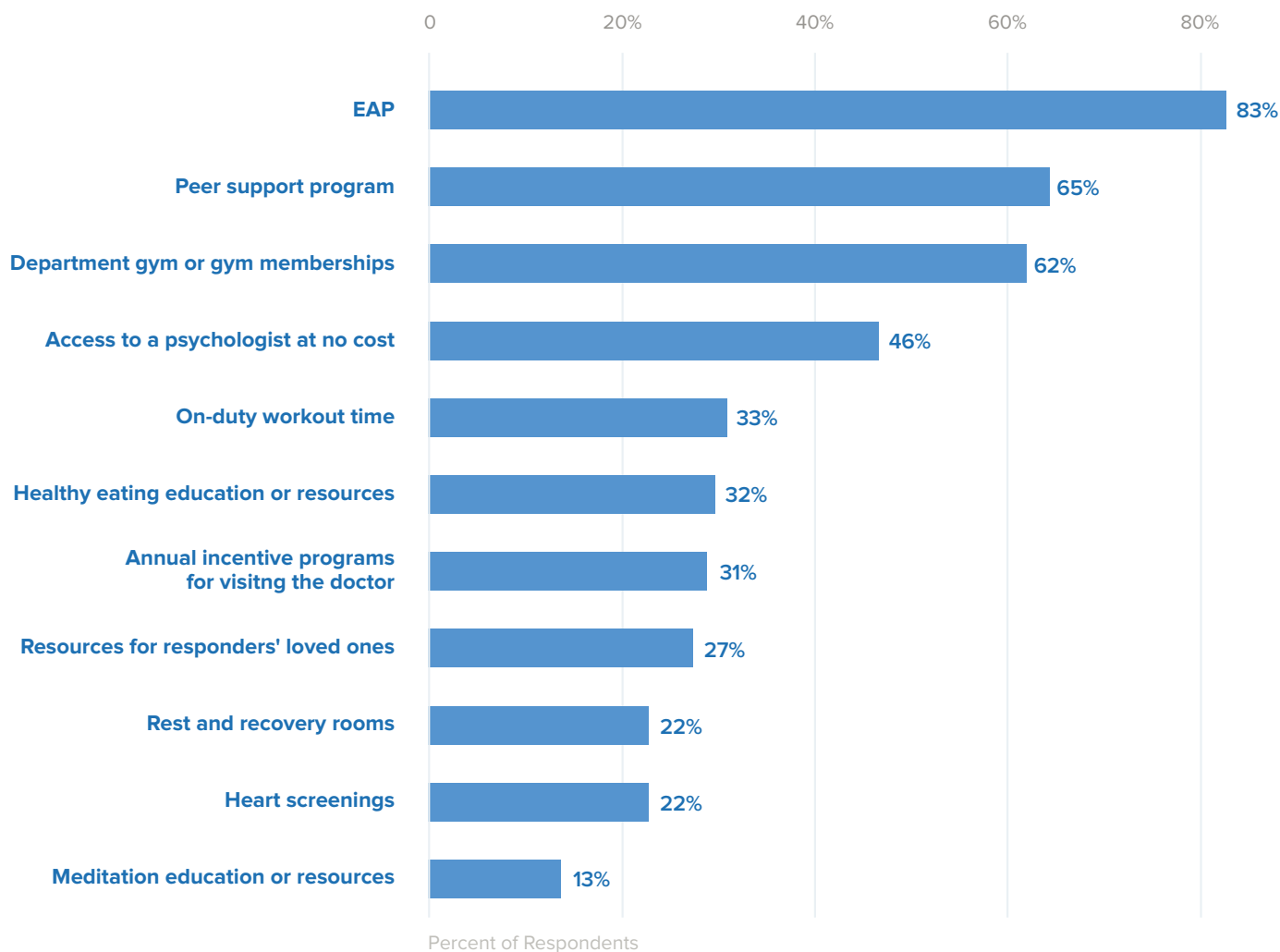
Survey respondents offer an array of health and wellness benefits to their employees. To support employee mental health, agencies are offering access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), peer support programs, and free access to psychologists. Many agencies give employees access to a gym or allow time to workout while on-duty.

Agencies can also host annual heart screenings to help identify conditions early. Heart conditions are a top health issue for responders and are costly medical events for agencies. Thankfully, almost all cardiac events are avoidable if properly diagnosed.

Figure 6

Health and Wellness Benefits Offered

Source: NEOGOV 2023 survey results



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TREND #5: TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

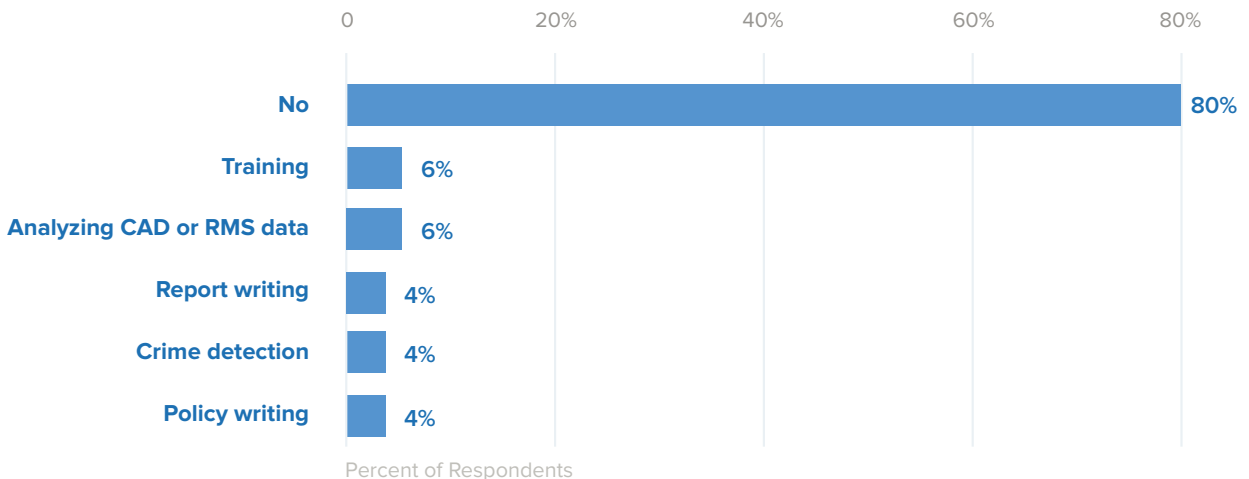
Generative AI roared onto the scene in 2023, and many industries have turned to AI-powered tools to transform operations, create efficiencies, and enhance productivity. But according to our survey, AI hasn't made its way into public safety agencies just yet.

80% of public safety agencies are not exploring the use of AI. Only a handful are using AI to help with training, analyzing CAD data, writing reports and policies, and crime detection.

Although AI seems out of reach for many public safety agencies, AI technology is the (not so distant) future. While there are ethical and security challenges to consider, the potential benefits of AI are significant. Generative AI tools are capable of analyzing large amounts of disparate data, which means agencies can gain access to new and important insights.

Used responsibly, AI can analyze vast amounts of historical crime data to identify patterns, and scour online sources to locate individuals or groups expressing concerning behavior. AI can be used to detect and prevent cyberattacks, predict traffic routes, and analyze weather data to help agencies prepare for severe weather events. The possibilities are truly immense.

Figure 7
Exploring Use of AI
Source: NEOGOV 2023 survey results



NEXT STEPS

Thank you for reading the 2024 Trends Report by PowerDMS. We hope these peer insights, data analyses, and resources have been helpful.

PowerDMS by NEOGOV is a public safety workforce management platform that helps over 6,000 agencies maintain compliance, automate manual workflows, build public trust, and improve overall department health. PowerDMS offers cloud-based solutions to help with shift scheduling, training, policy management, accreditation management, citizen engagement, and officer wellbeing.

13,000+

Public Sector Agencies

800,000+

People Use NEOGOV

20+

Years of Experience

