

Pathways to Policing Program – Columbia Heights

Background

The City of Columbia Heights is a first ring suburb covering about three and a half square miles with a 2021 population of 21,835 people. The Columbia Heights Police Department also provides service to the city of Hilltop, a small community located within the city of Columbia Heights, comprising an additional 800 residents and a high proportion of retail property. Twelve percent of the population is considered to be at or below the poverty level, though that percentage is higher among minority groups. The community is very diverse, with approximately 58% White, 20% Black, 11% Hispanic, and 7% Asian comprising the largest groups. The local school district reports over 30 different languages spoken in the schools and approximately 25% of households speak a primary language other than English. The community has a high rate of transiency, with above average numbers reporting having moved within the last year.

The City of Columbia Heights has an authorized strength of 31 full time police officers but has struggled to achieve that number in the current hiring and retention landscape. The police department is currently at 27 sworn officers. In 2025, the police department responded to 24,520 calls for service (Anoka County Central Communications 2025). The crime rate for both violent and property crimes are just above average when compared to the state, making Columbia Heights residents more likely to be the victim of a crime than other cities; and the police department busier overall. In addition, society has placed higher expectations on the police officers to reduce use of force and spend more time deescalating crisis situations. Additional time spent training, longer time spent on calls, and an increase in language barriers encountered on calls have all further taxed the police resources in Columbia Heights.

In recent years the police department has found success in recruiting candidates from a variety of diverse backgrounds, including candidates from our local community. The demographics for both the sworn police officers, as well as our community service officers are outlined below. The department prioritizes Community Service Officers to fill police officer vacancies, and all are currently enrolled in a college program working towards a law enforcement degree.

	Police Officer	Community Service Officer
White	14	0
Black	10	5
Hispanic/Latino	2	2
Asian	1	0
Male	23	5
Female	4	2

Defining a non-traditional candidate

For the purposes of this grant application, the police department is defining a non-traditional candidate as those from diverse racial populations, those from the LGBTQI communities, as well as women interested in a career in law enforcement. The focus will be on those experiencing financial and educational obstacles to attending a qualified law enforcement degree program.

Project Plan

The funding from this grant program will allow the police department to continue this effort of recruiting local and diverse candidates who would experience obstacles and challenges to obtaining their education without assistance. This recruitment will be a combination of social media advertising as well as collaboration with city administrators, elected officials, the school district, and interested parties in our community to help identify and recruit qualified individuals into this program. Members of our Multi-cultural Advisory Committee will be included to help recruit. Additionally, the police department will reach out to local law enforcement associations like the National Latino Police Officers Association, National Black Police Association, Somali-American Police Officers Association, and the Minnesota Association of Women Police. The selection process will focus on candidates that embrace the community policing philosophy employed by the Columbia Heights Police Department and are interested and willing to be engaged and empowered problem solvers in making the community a safer place. Additionally, the ideal candidate will speak more than one language and have experience interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. The candidate will be employed as a Community Service Officer working part-time hours while attending a local college for an associate degree in law enforcement. The wages will be used for the city match of the grant funding.

The budget for the Pathways to Policing candidate is below and includes the entry level wage for our CSO officers, as well as expenses to background and hire a potential candidate.

Pathways to Policing Budget			
		Price Per Credit	Cost
Police Officer Licensing Credits	37	\$ 299.67	\$ 11,087.79
General Education Credits	31	\$ 197.97	\$ 6,137.07
POLIC 2262			\$ 25.00
POLC 2300			\$ 599.00
Books and Supplies	18 classes	\$150 per class	\$ 2,700.00
Wages (20hrs a week)	\$ 27.83		\$ 51,207.20
Fringe	51.3% of wages		\$ 26,269.29
Background and Medical			\$ 1,000.00
Uniforms, computer, supplies			\$ 1,000.00
Total			\$ 100,025.35