

Filling the Ranks

Tucked in a back corner of the headquarters building, background investigators are making calls and taking notes. With the number of applicants needing screened, they can hardly keep up. The background checks are an integral part of the hiring process and the stakes are high.

A [recent study of Trooper staffing](#) in B detachment shows that there just aren't enough troopers to go around. On top of staffing levels being critically low, the department has a vacancy rate of approximately 15%. It is crucial that DPS not only find good applicants but that the good applicants get hired to help fill the ranks.

"Previously we were getting good candidates, but they were having a hard time articulating themselves during the application process and not making it through," said Alaska State Trooper Lt. Derek DeGraaf, Recruitment Unit Supervisor. "Now we are essentially investing in people early on in the process to help them navigate the application and decide on what information to include. It is really paying off."

Before putting in an application, candidates must pass a written exam by at least 70%. The exams are proctored nearly everywhere in Alaska. For applicants not in Alaska, the test can be proctored at any [National College Testing Association test center](#). The test was designed to measure numerous areas that are related to successful performance as a law enforcement officer. The test contains questions covering two broad areas: cognitive abilities and non-cognitive traits.

Additionally, the recruitment unit came up with the Candidate Assistance and Mentoring Program (CAMP). It isn't a required portion of the process, but CAMP helps guide applicants through the process. The Recruitment Unit even posted a [link](#) to a recorded version of CAMP for applicants that can't attend a CAMP in person.

"We want quality people to succeed so we've set up ways to essentially train people on how to apply," said Alaska State Trooper Sgt. Dave Willson. "We tell them upfront that while something in their past might embarrass them they still need to disclose it. Unfortunately we have had good candidates not disclose something and it wouldn't have even disqualified them."

The hiring process for the Alaska State and Wildlife Troopers is a very comprehensive and time consuming process. The applicant must provide significant details, going back ten years or more. Documentation requirements are rigid and expectations are high. Those who are not attentive to the details, tend to not pass through the rigors of the application process. In order to be more successful, a candidate should follow directions and timelines, keep the recruitment office up to date on their application and any changes that occur during the hiring process.



Alaska State and Wildlife Troopers in B Detachment cover an area approximately the size of Florida.



To become a Trooper, Recruits go through an 18-week Academy in Sitka, Alaska, followed by about a year of Field Training.



A big part of being a trooper is community policing, getting to know the people in the areas they serve.

“The first step is walking them through the minimum requirements. Do they actually qualify? We are currently ranging between 300 and 400 applications per cycle, four times a year, which equates to 600-700 applications per academy,” said Sgt. Willson. “This is up drastically from 18 months ago, when we only received 111 applications for an entire academy class in July 2017.”

Less than half the applicants will get background packets since they need to take and pass the written test and meet the Alaska Police Standards Council and Department of Public Safety minimum qualifications first. Not all of those who receive a background packet will fill it out and return it in a timely fashion. In the end, only about 25% of initial applicants will pass the background process and move on to the next stage which includes a PT test, a polygraph and a psych evaluation.

“So far, this recruitment cycle, we have extended job offers to approximately 13 people,” said Lt. DeGraaf. “By the time this recruitment cycle is closed we will hopefully have hired about double that for our February 2019 training academy.”

Between retirements and people leaving for other reasons, DPS is continuously recruiting. If you are interested in becoming an Alaska State Trooper, Alaska Wildlife Trooper, Court Services Officer or a Deputy Fire Marshal, please check out our recruitment unit website at www.alaskastatetrooper.com and call us at 1-877-AKTROOP.



Trooper Scott Corino has been with AST for about a year and a half. He has friends that are cops outside of Alaska. Trooper Corino says working in Alaska is beyond compare to other law enforcement jobs. He does more than his cop buddies in other states and says he has a lot more fun.



An Alaska Wildlife Trooper was able to utilize Helo-2 for a moose hunt patrol along Beaver Creek, outside of Fairbanks, Alaska.

