

Choosing a Professional Peace Officer Education (PPOE) Program that is Right for You

There are no police academies in Minnesota. Instead, those interested in becoming a licensed peace officer must:

- Earn a degree from a regionally accredited college or university, and
- Successfully complete a program of professional peace officer education (the PPOE) from one of the colleges and universities certified by the POST Board.

Unless you already have a degree the quickest way to become licensed is to complete both requirements simultaneously by attending one of the schools on the POST Board's list of certified PPOE schools. The POST Board can't tell you which school is right for you but here are some things to consider.

1. Make sure the school you choose is POST Board certified and regionally accredited.

Only schools on the POST Board's directory of board-certified schools will lead directly to peace officer licensure in Minnesota. The curriculum in the professional peace officer education programs at these schools complies board-required learning objectives. Criminal justice and law enforcement programs at other schools do not.

The POST Board also requires the degree be earned at a school that is accredited by one of the six regional accrediting bodies in the U.S. The POST Board certified schools are regionally accredited. This accreditation can help with access to federal student aid, transferability of credits and access to post-graduate education too.

Be careful because there are criminal justice and law enforcement programs at other schools that are nationally accredited or have some other type of accreditation. If your degree is earned at one of these schools you will need to earn an additional degree to meet the Minnesota licensure requirements.

2. Decide whether you want your degree to be in Criminal Justice or Law Enforcement and what level of degree do you want to earn.

Some of the POST certified schools offer the professional peace officer education as part of a law enforcement degree, others as part of a criminal justice degree. Talk to schools about this difference before you decide. Ask about things like transferability and access to post graduate education if these things are important to you.

Likewise, you will have to decide if you want to earn a baccalaureate (4-year) degree or an associate (2-year) degree. You may become eligible to take the *Minnesota Peace Officer Licensing Examination* with either degree, however your choice may have an impact on your hireability and will have impact on how long it takes for you to become license eligible.

3. Location matters when you choose a school.

There are 30 POST certified PPOE programs located at sites all over Minnesota. The school that is nearest you may be the right choice but you should consider:

- Some schools provide the entire PPOE program at their campus and some contract with another school to provide a portion of the practical skills education at another location. If the location of the skills component is important to you ask about it before you choose a school.
- Many schools now offer courses online or in a blended online and classroom format. This might just include a couple of courses or an entire degree program (except the practical hands portion of course). If online education is of interest to you, ask about it before selecting a course for its proximity.

4. Size

Some schools and programs are quite large and have advantages a large program can offer, e.g., larger law enforcement staff and more students to interact with, a law enforcement club, etc. Other programs are smaller and can provide a more personal program, with smaller class sizes and more direct teacher to student contact.

5. School Type and Cost – Public, Private and For-Profit

All three types of schools are included on the POST Board's list of certified programs. The type of school impacts the school's philosophy, program cost and financial aid.

6. Program Length and Scheduling

Some programs are primarily aimed at traditional students with a mixture of day and evening course offerings. Others have programs designed for working adults with courses offered at night, on weekends or through a variety of distance learning methods. You'll need to pick a program that offers the PPOE using methods that suit your needs and learning style.

7. Program Requirements

Each school has to meet POST required admission standards and provide education based on a set of POST approved learning objectives but schools can have requirements that go beyond the basics. If you are interested in a school's requirements for physical fitness testing, psychological screening, academic standards, or criminal history check the school's program coordinator can advise you.