

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Implementing the Compstat System  
in Small Departments**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The relevance of the Compstat system in small police departments to law enforcement is that now small police departments will have a guide that may be used for implementing the system within their own department. The guide is designed to be a tool to assist in developing the agencies own system. The agency can adjust and reform the system to fit the needs of their department.

This research will allow small police departments to see that the Compstat system can be used within their departments. Many departments will be able to take the researcher's model and use it or adapt it to the needs of their community.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, books, and a telephone survey to 20 survey participants. The researcher discovered that the use of a written guide for implementing Compstat would be beneficial to chief administrators of small police departments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Compstat, short for comparative statistics, was the name that was given to the New York City Police Department's management accountability process. It was seen as a dynamic approach to crime reduction, quality of life improvement, and personnel management. Compstat was a multilayered system that included the use of maps of crime areas and weekly meetings with the command staff.

The command staff was instructed to devise strategies and tactics to solve problems and reduce crime. Supervisors were held accountable and had to produce results or face being removed from their command. The core elements of Compstat were the following: accurate/ timely intelligence, rapid deployment, effective tactics, and relentless follow-up and assessment. Compstat has been recognized as a major innovation in American policing, and after seeing the positive results of the system, many larger police departments began using the Compstat system.

While information on the Compstat system has been studied and reviewed since its conception in 1994, little has been done to address the use of the Compstat system for small police departments with less than 50 officers. Research found two studies that looked at the use of Compstat in small police departments, but they approached the subject by focusing on if Compstat could function in small departments and if it could be adjusted to work in smaller police departments.

Many small cities and towns across Texas have seen a growth in population as more move from the larger cities into the rural areas and small towns. Along with the growth in population came an increase in the crime rate for these small towns. Small police departments are starting to see a need to address the crime issues in their

communities using a different approach from the traditional methods of the past. The issue to be examined considers the use of implementing the Compstat system within small police departments as well as the importance of using the four core elements of the system.

The relevance of using the Compstat system in small police departments will allow small police departments to have a guide that may be used for implementing the system within their own department. The research will allow small police departments to see that the Compstat system can be used within their departments. Many departments will be able to take the researcher's model and use it or adapt it to needs of their community.

The goal of this research is to propose a model or guide for use in smaller police departments. Small police departments can adopt or adjust this model for use within their departments. Using the four core elements of the Compstat system will ensure timely intelligence for rapid deployment and effective tactics. A relentless follow-up and assessment will thereby reduce crime.

The research question examined focuses on how small police departments can implement the Compstat system into their department using the core elements of the system. The research will provide a guide that can be adjusted or tailored to meet the needs of a small police department. Following these core elements will reduce crime and increase the quality of life for their communities.

The intended method of inquiry includes a review of various articles, law enforcement journals, past research papers, books, and personal interviews. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research will be to provide a working

model for use or adaptation for small police departments. The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because this research will serve as a model or guide for small police departments.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Due to rising crime rate in the 1980s, many large cities demanded police intervention. Police departments responding to this demand fell short of meeting the community's needs (Weisburd & Braga, 2006). Compstat, a multilayered system that included the use of maps of crime areas and weekly meetings with the command staff, was developed by the then New York Transit Police Chief William Bratton and his Deputy Chief, Jack Maple, in 1994.

Bratton and Maple identified four core elements for crime reduction (Maple, 1999). These core elements moved crime reduction beyond the traditional methods, such as putting more officers in the street or only reacting to crime after it had occurred, and became an in-depth managerial tool. Once implemented, the uses of the core elements were instrumental in the reduction of crime. The use of Compstat also increased productivity throughout the entire city.

Compstat revolutionized policing in the mid 1990s by adding generally unheard of levels of accountability to crime fighting, and it contributed to the national downward trends in crime reduction. In areas where crime rates should have risen, a dramatic decrease in crime was seen. Violent crimes, such as murder, robberies, and rape, were most affected by use of the Compstat system. New York's overall crime went down 57%; murder was reduced 65%, and a city once infamous around the world for its

dangerous streets was now recognized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the safest large city in America (Bratton, 1998).

The Compstat system has a proven track record with many large departments, including New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Miami, and Los Angeles. Once the Compstat system was in place, these cities saw overall decreases in their crime rates. Many of these larger cities are still using the Compstat system. The positive results that were seen with the use of Compstat now have mid-sized to small agencies implementing the use of the system.

One of the unique attributes of Compstat is that it allows for the needs of the department, large or small. Caufield (2007) questioned if Compstat would be able to function in smaller departments. He found that Compstat could be adapted for smaller departments, but manpower was a critical problem because the smaller department has fewer officers to handle any given situation. Command staff must understand the manpower need when creating additional details that function with the department's routine operation, and they must understand the pitfalls when the system had been overtaxed (Caufield, 2007).

Although there are many versions of the Compstat system, each is a system that identifies emerging crime trends for the efficient use of resources to target those trends. Statistics alone are not enough. Compstat requires law enforcement to think outside the box for solutions that are not the normal approach to issues of crime prevention and to question the status quo, which ensures that policies, procedures, and tactics remain current.

The Compstat system goes to the core of the primary mission of any police department: to reduce crime and prevent criminal activities. A vital component of Compstat is holding police management directly accountable for combating crime in their assigned area and providing them the authority to deploy their resources to achieve results.

The four core elements provide a basic road map on how to get departments back into the business of proactively fighting crime rather than just reacting to it. Using the four core elements increases awareness of crimes committed and provides ways to communicate crime patterns to staff. The use of the four elements of Compstat also assists in strategically planning how to effectively combat the crime trend. By following these basic four elements, police departments of any size can reduce crime.

The first element is timely, accurate intelligence (Maple, 1999). Timely and accurate information is essential in effectively responding to any problem or crisis. This need must be clearly stated when implementing the Compstat system. A clear strategy must be in place that integrates efficient information and communication methods by which data can be disseminated. This data then allows for the following: providing supervisory personal and resources with accurate information of when different types of crime are being committed, pinpointing where crimes are being committed, establishing how crimes are being committed, and identifying those who are committing the crimes. Since today's policing consists of vast amounts of information, it is necessary to provide a vehicle where information can be shared at all levels of the organization. It is important that this information is shared with everyone, from the patrolman on the street to the Chief of Police. This principle provides for an early warning system to identify

crime trends and patterns. Due to limited budgets, being able to apply the necessary resources to an identified problem area is crucial. With accurate information, the effectiveness of the police response can increase.

The second element is effective tactics (Maple, 1999). Policing tactics are directed at apprehending the suspect. While this is an important part of the Compstat system, it does not stop there. One requirement of Compstat is that police focus attention on the social and environmental situations that may be adding to problem. To develop effective tactics, the following are required: analyze the information; evaluate possible tactics using what may have worked in the past; adopt tactics based on fact; ensure that tactics address all of the issues to effect change in the crime rates, including social and environmental changes; and develop tactics that are adaptable and adjustable to changing crime trends. Tactics must be designed to bring about a permanent change, and this will often involve other agencies outside of the police. The police will focus on crime control, but involving other agencies to maintain the positive changes made is important and increases the productivity of an ever-shrinking resource pool. These tactics also provide a sense of urgency in responding to problems. Every case is to be handled as if it were a big case and should be thoroughly and rapidly investigated. Another important part to using this element is remembering that all units of the department must work together. Under older police models, specialized units worked without the knowledge and support of the area officers. In the Compstat system, all units must be represented and held jointly responsible for the successes and failures. The benefit is that more creative and effective crime control measures are designed when all units develop and implement strategies.

The third element is rapid deployment. For many years, police departments have been driven by the need to respond to calls for service with limited resources. With Compstat, departments now are armed with vital information of crime trends or patterns that allow for a strategic response. Once a tactic is developed, it is necessary to gather and put into operation an assortment of personnel and resources. By quickly organizing and deploying resources in the field, the department is able to control the problem before it becomes a crisis. Experience with using Compstat system has shown that effective plans require different units working together. The best results occur when patrol, investigations, and administration all focus on a coordinated effort. Police officers should be deployed strategically using traditional methods, such as uniformed officers or plain-clothes officers, as well as the non-traditional methods, such as stings and decoys. Barriers between the operating units must be broken down so that a spirit of cooperation materializes and a rapid deployment of resources is enabled. The strategies and tactics can come from anyone in the department, from the patrolman to the supervisors. It is important to allow for strategies and tactics to flow up from the rank and file because other officers will buy-in quicker once its known that someone from their own unit created the strategy.

The fourth element is relentless follow-up and assessment. The essential element in any operation is the need to assess past tactics and review what worked and what did not work. Compare this to the business model, where creating and implementing an unsuccessful strategy or providing an unacceptable level of customer service would lead to the failure of the business. Much like business, the bottom line of the Compstat system is results. To properly implement Compstat, it is essential to

record data before and after the tactic has been employed. Assessment on the report of crimes, arrests made, and results achieved must be recorded so that the tactic employed is measured. It is important to know what tactic worked and state clearly which elements worked the best, thereby allowing for the design of tactics to evolve for addressing future crime problems. If it is determined that a problem has been solved, this allows for re-deployment of resources to the next crime problem. Everything the police department does, whether it is administrative, operational, or investigative, is evaluated by the results achieved. Operations that do not provide successful results are immediately assessed for their value and changed to improve the overall operation of the department.

Communication is also a large part of the Compstat system; therefore, weekly or bi-weekly meetings should be held. During these meetings, a review of the crime analysis data of the city is discussed. Supervisors share their success and strategize with all members of the staff for areas of improvement. These meetings should serve to reaffirm responsibility and ownership of crime problems within the city. Supervisors are expected to be aware of crime trends and have solutions. Crime problems from previous Compstat meetings are continually discussed and monitored until the problem is eliminated. These meetings should provide a platform to discuss organizational obstacles that may be impeding the successful implementation of reducing crime and present new nontraditional ideas or solutions directly to the executive staff.

The Compstat system is a continuous cycle of reviewing, strategizing, taking action, and being held accountable for results. This will streamline the department in the area of its crime-fighting abilities and will increase its effectiveness in responding

quickly to crime problems. By following these core elements of the Compstat system, a reduction in the overall occurrence of crime will emerge.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research question to be examined considers whether or not the Compstat system, if presented as a written guide, will assist small police departments, 50 officers or less, in implementing Compstat. The researcher hypothesizes that small police departments, who have access to a written guide for the Compstat system, will implement it within their agency.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, books, journals, and a survey of police managers using personal phone interviews. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of implementing the Compstat system in small departments will include a telephone survey.

The size of the survey consisted of three questions that the researcher personally asked each of the 20 survey participants from 20 police departments, which all had less than 50 police officers. The departments were from central and south Texas. The participants were asked whether or not they currently use a Compstat-like system, whether or not they thought that a written Compstat guide would be useful for implementing a Compstat system, and whether or not they would implement a Compstat-like system using the guide. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 100% participation. Each participant answered all three questions. The author will analyze the information obtained from the survey. This information will be presented in the findings to show the use of Compstat in small departments.

In order to learn more about the use of Compstat within small police departments, a telephone survey was conducted of 20 departments, each with less than 50 officers. The survey included departments from the south and central areas of Texas. Three questions were asked, and the figure below shows the response to the survey.

## FINDINGS

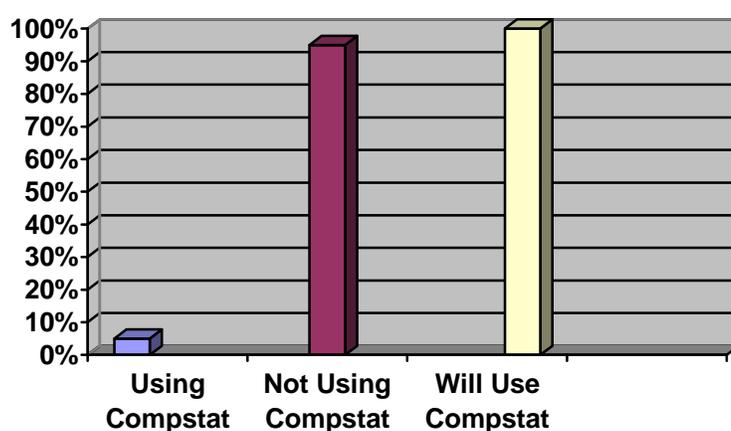


Figure 1. Percentage of participants regarding their use of Compstat.

As shown in Figure 1, of the departments surveyed, only 5% said that they are currently using a Compstat-like system. The departments that were surveyed showed that 95% were using no system at all to collect crime data or to plan for a response to crime trends. The chief administrator of each department surveyed said that if a guide was provided, they would be willing to implement a Compstat-like system at their agency.

Independent research has found that it is likely that more than the surveyed agencies are not using any form of data collection of crime statistics. The FBI does collect crime data from all agencies in the Uniform Crime Report. The data collected is

collected on a month-to-month basis and is not published until the following year. The statistics gathered do not show all crimes committed.

## **DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS**

The research question posed during this review was whether small police agencies would implement a Compstat system within their agency if a written guide was provided as basis to implement the program. The author found that most small police departments in the central and south central areas of Texas were not using a crime management system like Compstat. Some agencies were collecting crime data to measure the amount of crime within their jurisdiction, but they were not using that data to create preventive measures.

Previous research has shown that Compstat will function within a small police department. Modifications have to be made depending on the size of the department. Many practices of the "New York Model" can be removed to fit the needs of any agency. The important factors to Compstat are the four core elements.

Compstat provides a management structure for identifying crime trends and patterns and creating focused plans to stop or limit the trends. This design demands involvement and communication between all employees of the police department. The sharing of the knowledge learned from identifying current trends in crime will create a more unified and informed police department. This also creates more information exchanges and an understanding of the problem to be solved between all police personnel.

The argument against the Compstat program is the lack of manpower and resources. The most productive aspect of the Compstat program is the ability for police

managers to work outside the box and incorporate cooperation and understanding throughout a department. In truth, crime activities targeted by the Compstat program will exist regardless of the presence of the program.

Compstat simply gives management a structure for identifying crime patterns during their early stages of development. This allows for the creation of a plan of action to stop or limit the impact of the crime problem. The high peaks in crime rates are reduced and a stabilization of criminal activity is ultimately achieved.

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