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**Community Policing on a Limited Budget
A Look at How Departments Approach the Challenge**

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ABSTRACT

The on-going tight economic climate in local governments across the state bring challenges to police departments that are striving to maintain and improve their “Community Policing” efforts. This research looks at how to view an ideal “Community Policing” effort, what type of “Community Policing” efforts are currently being attempted and what work-process adjustments are being undertaken to provide additional time enabling police officers to address problem solving activities with the community. The research looked at previous studies conducted, literature on “Community Policing” and interviews with patrol commanders from 13 police departments from across the state. The research revealed that the departments have a consistent view of what an “ideal” “Community Policing” effort encompasses. The opinion of the departments reflect an institutionalized philosophy towards problem solving with the community as their preferred approach. The majority of the departments interviewed reported that they lacked the personnel resources needed to attain the higher level of “Community Policing” and approximately half of the departments reported scaling back their “Community Policing” efforts due to calls for service loads on their patrol officers. The research also revealed that slightly more than half of the departments have taken action to transfer limited work processes away from police officers and redirected those work processes to civilian personnel.

Departments are struggling to achieve the higher level of “Community Policing” while facing limited budgets. Departments should look for innovative ways to increase the time available to police officers and work closely with their governing bodies and the community to determine what level of service they are willing to finance.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose for this research is to analyze and answer what changes must be made regarding the work process and determine the changes departments should make in order to allow more time for officers to spend with the community. The research also examines what work processes performed by uniformed patrol personnel have been reassigned to civilians and considers how these processes play into the “Community Policing” model.

As policing in the twenty-first century focuses on how we effectively provide services to the public, police departments must look at the work processes and determine who gets assigned what part of the labor that needs to be accomplished. Police departments across the nation face an increasing demand for a more complete service to the community, which is expressed through what is called the “Community Policing” model. This model demands that police departments spend more time with not only victims of crime, but also with those members of the community who have not been victims. The model also proposes the involvement of the community in a collaborative effort to bring a better quality of life to the community. Police departments must find innovative ways to accomplish the directives from the community while minimizing the tax burden on that same community.

Police departments must take a thorough look at the actual work they are tasked to accomplish and consider what processes are being used to accomplish those tasks. Departments must bring maximum efficiency to the work process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research became two-fold. First, it must be conceded that there is no universal definition among police departments as to what “Community Policing” is. Some departments describe community policing as different programs and out-reach initiatives whereas others describe it as an institutional philosophy.

Researchers allude to specialized portions of police departments that take on the role of facilitators within the community, while at the same time refer to “Community Policing” as being an institutionalized philosophy.

A 1967 Presidential Commission on Law enforcement suggests departments should create “Community Service Officers.” Early efforts at creating a “Community Policing” model suggest that departments create “Community Policing” units that stay in their assigned areas and rarely leave their assigned districts to answer calls for service in adjacent areas (Palmiotto, 2000).

Contrasting opinions lean toward an institutionalized approach where all personnel are focused on problem solving in a collaborative effort with the governing body and the community. Palmiotto (2000) suggests that separate community policing units should be abolished and every officer should play the role as a community policing officer.

The Department of Justice office of Community Oriented Policing proposes that all of the aforementioned programs and activities are indeed correct. The 2003 study conducted by the Office of Community Oriented Policing suggests that the infancy stages of moving into a “Community Policing” model involves the creation of specialized officers. Additionally, it is important to establish policing units responsible for specific geographical assignments that are allowed to handle issues within their given areas

without having the pressure of responding to calls for service in other areas within their jurisdiction. The study also indicates the necessity of departments to change how calls are prioritized through a managed call response plan.

The study by the office of Community Policing Services (2003) suggests that departments must evaluate how they handle calls for service and develop programs that allow police officers to spend more of their time focused on problem solving with the community. Many departments have seen success with the implementation of programs utilizing civilians and alternative reporting methods. Several departments have implemented TRU's (telephonic reporting units), which are staffed by civilian personnel responsible for completing the crime reports on limited types of crimes. Very large departments around the country have implemented an alternative phone number know as 3-1-1 to report non-emergency incidents. The U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (2003) suggests that innovative call management strategies can aid in freeing up officer time.

Research conducted by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (2003) indicates that departments are using alternative reporting methods which include walk-in, mail-in and internet reporting of crimes in an effort to create more time for police officers to spend on problem solving with the community.

According to Schafer (2001), research suggests that prior to implementation of generalized "Community Policing," agencies need to ensure that they have sufficient resources. It may tax a department's personnel and financial resources in order to execute their plan in a successful manner.

The lack of a universal definition of "Community Policing" may leave departments, facing limited budgets, ill-prepared when preparing options for the

decision makers of government regarding how they want their police agencies to operate within the community. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice (2004) suggests that departments achieving the higher stages of “Community Policing” were also supported by local elected officials that were committed to its success.

METHODOLOGY

The research examines what work processes performed by uniformed patrol personnel have been reassigned to civilians and considers how these changes play into the “Community Policing” model. The research also examines what changes should be made in order to allow more time for sworn police officer personnel to spend on community problem solving issues.

The methodology that will be used will include a personal interview survey of departments from across the state, professional papers, journals and a review of related research.

It is hypothesized that the research will show the tendency of departments to eliminate services to the community before maximizing the work processes that sworn police officer personnel perform. This practice, if true, could be counter-productive to the department’s efforts to provide services within the community policing model.

The community’s expectation of service from departments and the desire of departments to provide that service within limited budgets should force departments to maximize efficiency. This research should offer alternatives to the “cutting services first” approach as departments and their governing bodies struggle to accomplish their missions. These alternatives should benefit not only the Law Enforcement profession but also the community it serves.

FINDINGS

The research in this paper examined how the sample departments approach “Community Policing” how their desired “Community Policing” programs have been impacted by perceived or actual budget shortfalls. It is hypothesized that department’s tend to cut back on what they categorize as “Community Policing” programs or efforts before they look at transferring work onto civilians, thus leaving more time for sworn police officers to dedicate to “Community Policing” efforts. The benefits of this research should encourage departments and their governing bodies to look at their work processes and examine the allocation of those processes as they consider their budgets.

The first method was to review any research literature on the subject of “Community Policing” and use of civilians in law enforcement. The literary research found a number of examples where exploration has been conducted on the use of civilians in police departments to transfer some of the work off of police officers. However, no examples were found determining how the use of civilians impacted their community policing efforts.

Phone interviews with patrol commanders from 13 agencies from across the state show that departments have a common view of what an ideal “Community Policing” model is. The interviews also determine that departments are not currently operating in what they perceive as an “ideal” ‘Community Policing’ model.

Departments reported the scaling back of some of their “Community Policing” efforts and a limited transfer of work from sworn police officers to civilian personnel.

Of the 20 agencies contacted, 13 participated in phone interviews. All of the agencies interviewed said they viewed an ideal “Community Policing” model as one in which all of the personnel are involved in problem solving with the community.

The College Station Police Department in College Station, Texas, involves all sworn police officer personnel in their “Community Policing” philosophy. The challenges they face are evident due to the insufficient personnel and time restraints resulting from resultant calls for services on officers. College Station Police Department has shifted some work processes away from sworn police officers to civilian personnel in the form of PSO’s (public safety officers) to handle abatements in the city. College Station Police Department reports no scaling back of services.

The Lewisville Police Department would prefer to have all personnel involved in their “Community Policing” efforts but use NRO’s (neighborhood resource officers) due to insufficient personnel resources. The Lewisville Police Department has civilianized some training functions, fleet management and crime analysis.

The Missouri City Police Department prefers to have all of their personnel involved in the problem solving. The department reports that they do not have any significant “Community Policing” efforts due mainly to the lack of effective training and the lack of budgeted monies. Missouri City Police Department has not approached the idea of moving work processes from sworn police officers to civilian personnel.

Of the agencies interviewed, all prefer a “Community Policing” model that leans toward a philosophical approach which surmises that all employees take an active role in the problem solving process with the community. The research determines that only about 30% of the departments interviewed feel that they have the resources to implement their preferred model and are currently doing so. The research determines

that approximately 50% of the departments interviewed have scaled back some of the elements of their “Community Policing” approach due to insufficient personnel resources and increasing calls for service loads on the patrol officers. Approximately 55% of the departments interviewed have transferred some of the work processes from sworn police officers to civilian personnel.

Research conducted by the Presidential Commission on Law Enforcement (1967) identifies the need for departments to find areas within organizations where civilians can perform jobs that are currently staffed by sworn police officers. The study cited the need to put more officers back in their geographically assigned patrol areas.

Research conducted by Richard Ashe of the Temple Police Department identifies a number of areas within departments across the state where civilian personnel have displaced sworn police officers from jobs that do not require the skills of a police officer in this same effort to place additional sworn police personnel on the street.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research is to see how department’s “Community Policing” efforts have been impacted by limited budgets. The author hypothesizes that departments might cut back on proactive community policing efforts due to rising calls for service loads and will minimally transfer work processes off of sworn police officers to civilian personnel.

Interviews were conducted with 13 departments from across the state. All of the departments favor a more comprehensive “Community Policing” effort within their communities. These desires are impacted by the finite amount of dollars in their budgets and frequently require the scaling back of programs. The departments involved

in the study have all considered civilianizing portions of the work process and some of the departments have made limited progress in this direction.

The research supports some of the hypothesis in observing that departments tend to be forced to shift sworn police officer personnel away from some of their proactive “Community Policing” efforts in an effort to focus on calls for service. Additionally, the research shows that a number of departments are making strides toward redefining what work processes must be accomplished by their limited sworn police officer personnel.

This research is somewhat limited by the unknown impact of the give and take of the budget processes in the different governments. Without adequately educating the community and the political entities that departments are in, a perpetual balancing act takes place between the need to make changes in who is doing what work and the difficulty of adding sworn police officers to the staff.

Departments are always obligated to conduct effective operations as efficiently as possible with the tax payer’s money. Departments should consider carefully evaluating the work processes and develop plans within their department that educate the community and their governing bodies, allowing them an opportunity to decide what level of funding they are willing to dedicate to achieve the level of service they desire from their police departments.

Departments may find that the governing body and the community are also after the same model of “Community Policing” that the departments presented in this research desire. This approach may make a difference in the give and take during the budget process, but with the finite amount of dollars available, the governing body and the community will at a minimum be able to decide what level of service they are

capable of financing. The more with less philosophy is paramount when spending tax payer's dollars and the research demonstrates that departments struggle with the desire to provide service at the level they believe is effective.

The challenge for departments and communities to develop an ideal "Community Policing" model is undermined when departments are forced to reassign police officers away from "Community Policing" efforts to respond to calls for service. This emphasizes the importance of a careful evaluation of the impacts of reassignments to the departments "Community Policing" efforts, the importance of managing how departments respond to calls for service and the importance of involving the political leadership and the community when determining what level of service they are willing to finance.

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