

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Justification for the Creation and Implementation  
of Police Canine Units**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Many departments would like to have a canine unit but are not able to implement and maintain a unit for various reasons, such as cost effectiveness and the risks associated with such a unit. However, the benefits of an effective canine unit far outweigh the costs and risks associated with the startup and maintenance of the unit. Canines offer a level of efficiency in managing certain types of calls, such as narcotics searches, building searches, and offender apprehension, to name a few. Inserting a canine team into these calls also provides an economical benefit in operational cost for manpower, as well as an added layer of protection for all officers involved in these calls. For these reasons and more, law enforcement agencies should consider the implementation of canines to meet the needs of the agency, as well as the community.

There are negative aspects of implementing and maintaining a canine unit. Liability is perhaps the most recognized concern of administrators when starting a unit. Liability concerns exist in almost every aspect of law enforcement. The use of canines is not any different; these can be easily overcome with ongoing training and proper handler selection. The cost to create and maintain a unit is also a major concern. This will be minimized by utilizing resources available to the agency. This may range from donations and grants to a yearly budget, as well as partnerships with local businesses.

Canine units present a positive image to a community while offering another element of protection to citizens. The pros far outweigh the cons of having and sustaining a canine unit. The unit will prove to be an asset to the department as well as the entire community when departments maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of resources available to them.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many law enforcement agencies are experiencing the challenges with regard to utilizing resources that meet economic and efficient needs, while addressing the growth of their communities. It is widely viewed that growth is beneficial to any community, although growth exposes such problems as manpower shortages, budgetary constraints, and lack of resources. Agency administrators should always be alert to ideas that will benefit their department financially, while offering a viable and efficient result. One such example of an efficient and cost effective resource is a canine unit.

It shall be the intention of the researcher to define and illustrate the manner in which a certified canine unit can be implemented and funded to any law enforcement agency, no matter their size or economic condition. The principals discussed herein will be consistent for canine units with one dog team or multiple dog teams. The use of canines has proven to be an effective resource in not only combating crime, but also improving community relations. The challenge of overcoming manpower shortages through aiding in searches, as well as the apprehension of suspects, is a solution to the question of the viability of a canine unit. Simple tasks that would require multiple officers can be achieved by utilizing a trained and certified police canine. Additional tasks that can be enhanced by a canine are narcotics searches and monetary seizures. Noted author and expert on canine issues, Terry Fleck stated, "Historically, the dog's primary purpose is that of a locating tool. We have simply harnessed the olfactory capabilities of the dog and put that to work for us as a locating tool" (Fleck, "K-9 (Canine) Public Demonstrations," n.d.).

The purpose of this research is to examine and objectively demonstrate the feasibility of creating and implementing a canine unit. Funding is a concern when considering the implementation of a canine unit. Several topics will be discussed, such as the cost effectiveness of maintaining a canine unit, as well as challenges that will have to be overcome. The financial obligation of a canine unit consists of ongoing training, special equipment and medical upkeep of the dog, as well as housing demands. There are many ways to successfully fund these financial obligations.

There are risks associated with in a canine unit. Overcoming the liability associated with a well-trained and maintained unit are of major concern to administrators. Selection of canine handlers is of vital importance to ensure the success of the unit. The selection and pairing of a canine and its handler is extremely critical to the success of the unit.

The benefit of maintaining and utilizing a canine unit far outweighs the risks that exist inherently with the unit. There are ongoing financial obligations in maintaining a canine unit, no matter the size of the unit. This research will demonstrate the ways in which the unit can subsidize itself. It will also show that a well-maintained and certified unit will survive the rigorous boundaries that exist within a court of law.

To combat the challenges and needs of progressing communities, law enforcement agencies should consider any and all resources available to them. There are many methods and ideas of how to obtain those resources. One of the most diverse resources available today is police service dogs; otherwise known as canines. As a result, law enforcement agencies should consider the implementation of canines to meet the needs of the agency, as well as the community.

## POSITION

A canine unit is potentially one of the most important units to supplement a law enforcement agency. The uses of a well-trained unit are limited only by how the unit is trained and what they are able to accomplish. One topic of debate involves the effectiveness of a canine unit, as well as the benefit to the community. The cost effectiveness is one aspect, as well as the effectiveness of the unit within the department and the community. The first issue that will be addressed is the cost effectiveness of utilizing a canine unit to supplement officers in the field.

As has been pointed out previously, growth is a vital part of any community. While growth brings financial stabilization and infrastructure to a community, it also strains existing resources. This is especially true when examining the increasing call loads and responsibility presented to a police department as a result of growth within a city. Problems such as manpower shortages and budgetary constraints to solve those problems come into play. A canine unit can ease some of these difficulties by performing some tasks that would ordinarily require the efforts of multiple police officers.

Examples of calls that could be minimized by a canine unit include but are not limited to building searches, vehicle searches, suspect apprehensions, narcotics detection, explosives detections, cadaver searches, and many others. The researcher will focus on a building search scenario to illustrate how the use of a canine could supplement patrol officers and reduce the time spent on that particular search. In the Canine Proposal created for the Frisco Police Department (Merritt, 2006), it was demonstrated that a canine unit could reduce patrol hours and which reduced hourly costs significantly.

The building used in this illustration was a retail space of approximately 310,000 square feet. To safely and effectively search this space, it would have required a minimum of six officers. The six officers would be split up in pairs. Two of the six would remain on the perimeter of the building on opposite corners to maintain visual contact with all four sides of the building. The remaining four officers would search the interior of the building, which consist of the approximate 310,000 square foot of usable space. The search would take the officers approximately one and a half to two hours to effectively search and clear the building (Merritt, 2006).

Again, for illustration purposes, it is assumed that the average officer's salary is \$25.00 an hour and that the search would require two hours to complete. When calculated, the costs of the man-hours alone for the individual officers computes to a total of \$300.00 spent to complete this one search. By adding a canine to this scenario, two of the six officers would be taken out of the equation, freeing those officers to handle other calls for service that would be holding. The canine and handler, who is also a police officer, would take the place of those two officers. This now presents a scenario that consists of the original two officers watching the perimeter, the canine, the handler and one cover officer to search the building, which is a feasible and equitable solution to safely and effectively search and clear the building.

Keeping the same salary requirements in place, one can immediately see the reduction of costs in man-hours. There are only four officer salaries to consider with the introduction of a canine into the equation. Another variable that is reduced with the canine is the time in which it would take to complete the search. A canine would be able to conduct this search much faster and more intensive by the very nature of how a

dog utilizes its remarkable sense of smell to locate potential suspects. It can be easily reasoned that the canine would be able to complete this search in half the time that it would take the original four officers. So by keeping the same salary figures in place, one can simply compute that the search will now take approximately one hour rather than the original two hours at a total cost of \$100.00 in man hours, as opposed to the \$300.00 figured in the scenario without the canine (Merritt, 2006).

**Table I.** Cost Comparison Chart

<b>BUILDING SEARCH</b>	<b>Officers Only Without Canine</b>	<b>Utilizing Canine</b>
Number of Officers Used	6	4
Average Hourly Wage	\$25.00	\$25.00
Time Required to Search	Two Hours	One Hour
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$300.00</b>	<b>\$100.00</b>

The benefits to the community from implementing a canine unit are also rewarding to all involved. From a community services standpoint, a canine unit can be utilized as a tool to reach citizens in a positive manner. The community services unit is perhaps one of the most visible units within a law enforcement agency. In most instances, this unit is the face of the department. A canine unit can be very beneficial to this type of unit for department sponsored community awareness events. A canine demonstration at an event will attract the attention of the general public more so than just a regular event. A good, well-trained, and professional canine team performing a demonstration for the public can generate positive response from the public in ways that would prove to be beneficial for not only the agency but also the entire city. This is



demonstrated by the Ventura Police Department K9 Unit in Ventura, CA. The unit is very active in partnering with their Crime Prevention Unit to present K9 demonstrations and deliver a message on crime prevention at the same time. They also take these opportunities to talk to the public, which has resulted in community-police partnerships ("K9 Program," n.d.).

Another area that would be beneficial in utilizing a canine unit would be with the tactical teams in law enforcement agencies, commonly known as SWAT teams. As many SWAT teams are called into situations with barricaded persons, a dog would be beneficial to send in to apprehend a potential hiding suspect. This technique presents another benefit of utilizing a canine. Law enforcement officers face potential dangerous situations on a regular basis. A dog is viewed as being expendable to some degree in law enforcement. The loss of a police dog, as difficult as it would be to endure, is always going to be acceptable when compared to the loss of an officer. While some may not view this as a benefit in the traditional meaning of the word, it becomes feasible and acceptable to lose a canine over a human life.

One of the most useful functions of a canine team is their remarkable ability to sniff out odors that are that they are trained to detect. An example of this would be a narcotics detection dog or an explosive detection dog. The more common of the two in the police world are narcotic detection dogs. This becomes an invaluable tool to the officers, when attempting to locate drugs. Bryson (2000) stated "The police dog has about 200 million olfactory receptors in his nose, 20 times the number in mans. Scent or odor: Airborne molecules that activate the sense of smell upon contact with the individuals nasal receptors" (as cited in Minton, 2008, p.4). The mere fact that a dog

has a remarkable sense of smell becomes an advantage in aiding officer's attempts in locating illegal drugs.

A situation where this becomes essential can be illustrated by a traffic stop where an officer suspects that the occupant(s) of a vehicle are transporting illegal drugs. The United States Supreme Court has stated that a canine trained in the detection of drugs, explosives, and other contraband can sniff the exterior of luggage or vehicles in a public place and that the sniff does not amount to a search under the Fourth Amendment ("Law Officer's Pocket Manual," 2013). This allows the officer to have a certified canine unit come to the location and conduct a sniff of the vehicle to determine the probable presence of the illegal drugs. This becomes a benefit to the officer when the occupant(s) of the vehicle deny the officers request for a consensual search of the vehicle for the purpose of locating illegal drugs.

Another benefit of having a police canine unit is to assist with apprehension of suspects. Again, as has been mentioned previously, a police dog's olfactory receptors come in to play as valuable tool when tracking suspects. A routine search that requires multiple officers can be greatly enhanced by a police dog. As in the building search example, officer numbers can be reduced by introducing a canine to the equation. The chances of apprehension are also greatly increased by relying on the dog's nose to sniff out the suspect.

This is achieved by the dog smelling and tracking skin rafts that are shed from the would be suspect. The scent that is produced from skin rafts is commonly referred to as "fear scent". The human body constantly sheds dead skin that is readily visible to the naked eye, especially on dark, rough fabrics rubbed against the skin ("Introduction

to Scent,” 1999). As the body sheds the skin rafts, it produces a trail of scent that allows a trained police dog to follow. As fear is introduced into the scenario, which is present when someone is actively fleeing the police, the skin rafts are shed at a much higher rate. The dog is able to pick up the scent and therefore will lead the handler to the suspect. There are atmospheric and ground conditions that enhance the dog's ability to track the scent, such as heavy dew on the ground. The dew holds the scent on the ground longer, allowing the canine a better chance of not losing the scent (“Introduction to Scent,” 1999). As one can ascertain from the information, a trained police canine is a great benefit in tracking suspects that have fled from officers on foot.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

A source of contention and area that has been problematic for departments attempting to initiate and maintain a canine unit has been the issue of liability. Liability can take several forms when talking about a canine unit. A question that will most likely always have to be answered is how to overcome the liability that exists with a canine unit. Liability has often been used as a reason for administrators to decide not to implement a canine unit. Interestingly, most things in law enforcement are inherently prone to liability risks. Therefore, in analyzing the potential for liability with a canine unit, the agency must weigh that potential liability versus the benefit (Fleck, “Using the “Liability” Word as an Excuse,” n.d.).

Law enforcement officers utilize many tools that present the potential for liability. Perhaps the most liable action law enforcement officers have is the potential to use deadly force, intentionally or accidentally. With that liability in mind, officers in the United States carry handguns as part of their standard equipment. Arguably, firearms

present the highest potential of liability to officers and their agencies. To overcome this liability, officers are trained and required to demonstrate their proficiency with their weapons regularly. This minimizes the liability not only to the officers' agencies but also to the officer, while minimizing the risk of litigation.

Another area of liability is the use of less lethal force. Less lethal force, although an option to deadly force, still presents an incredible risk of liability to the officer and the agency. Canines are considered as less lethal force in the eye of the courts. Therefore, a trained police canine can be lumped into the same category as TASERS, impact weapons, OC Spray, and other less lethal weapons. Despite the liability recognized with less lethal weapons, most officers in most agencies continue to carry less lethal force options daily. Again, it should be noted that as with firearms, officers have to be trained and demonstrate their proficiency with less lethal force options (Fleck, "Using the "Liability" Word as an Excuse," n.d.).

To reduce the liability of a canine unit, the canine team (handler and dog) must maintain a rigorous training regimen that is documented. The training proficiencies should be demonstrated annually to maintain certifications, which will serve as documentation to the courts to minimize liability and aid in litigation, as well as prosecution of cases in which the canine is used. The United States Police Canine Association is currently recognized by the United States Supreme Court as a certifying agency for law enforcement detection canines, whose handlers may be called to testify in court concerning incidents involving the dog and handler (Patton, 2009).

The selection process of choosing a handler and a dog is equally as important as training and certification in reducing the liability of a canine unit. An officer who is

interested in being a canine handler should possess certain traits and characteristics. This is, by no means, intended to be a complete list of required traits and characteristics. It is merely a snap shot of a well-qualified handler that would help to minimize the liability issues. According to Fleck, these people should possess and demonstrate “maturity, patience, initiative, flexibility, dependability, enthusiasm, emotional stability, and good interpersonal relationships with the public and other employees as well as good communications skills” (para.6). This person should also have a stable home life in which all family members are comfortable with having a canine in the home (Fleck, “K9 Handler,” n.d.)

There is a valid argument and point to be considered when discussing the liability of a canine unit. As mentioned above, law enforcement practices consist of many liabilities by the very nature of the demands of the business. As with any source of liability, there are many ways to combat and minimize those liabilities. The risk of litigation will always be present with a canine unit but careful implementation and ongoing training and certification will greatly minimize the risk of litigation. Looking at federal case law, it is the agency, not the handler that pays the price for not ensuring proper canine handler selection, retention and discipline (Fleck, “K9 Handler Selection,” n.d.).

As with the creation and implementation of any labor-intensive unit within law enforcement, financial obligations will be required. Money will need to be secured, not only to implement a canine program but also to maintain the unit. This requirement is often presented as an obstacle that will have to be overcome. Considering the budgets required by most agencies, there is simply not enough money to fund start-up units in

most cases. It can be very difficult to convince administrators to approve a budget request that includes additional funds for a new program, although it has proven to be a valuable resource.

The potential cost to create a single dog unit can total up to approximately \$75,000.00 to \$125,000.00, including the cost of the dog, specialized vehicle, equipment and the salary of the handler (Merritt, 2006). This cost represents the initial implementation, as well as the first year's maintenance cost. To maintain the unit in future years, an annual budget should be included to cover the annual expenses of maintaining the unit. The year-to-year required funds will be substantially less than the implementation costs. For units with multiple dogs, administrators should simply multiply the desired annual budget times the number of canine teams in the unit.

The most expensive portion of the implementation costs will be the amount of funds that will be spent on the canine specialty vehicle. This cost can be greatly minimized, if not eliminated, by issuing a pool car to the unit. A pool car is a spare patrol vehicle that is assigned for general use as a backup car. The car can be retrofitted with the special canine kennel and other specialized equipment required for transporting the dog. This is a viable way to cut cost dramatically, if and when pool cars are available to be retrofitted for use as a canine car.

Civic groups, foundations, and occasionally individual citizens seek out ways to support their communities and special needs that will benefit their communities. As has been shown previously, a canine unit is of great benefit to the community by serving as a valuable asset to the local law enforcement agency. An example of this is The Ben Roethlisberger Foundation. This foundation's purpose is to support police and fire

departments throughout the U.S. by providing financial support for K9 units and service dogs throughout the industry. Roethlisberger is quoted on the foundation website as saying, "My Dad instilled in me a love and respect for animals. This is a good way to combine that passion with a desire to support the police and fire departments, which deserve all the appropriate resources needed to protect our cities and neighborhoods, and allow these brave men and women to arrive home safely" ("Foundation", n.d.). Seeking out civic groups and foundations to obtain available funding donations is a logical way to offset the initial cost of implementing a canine unit.

Another avenue to explore is the availability of grants and federal funds offered for specialized units within law enforcement organizations. As stated on the Police One website, there are grants for dogs and equipment each year ([www.policeone.com/Grants](http://www.policeone.com/Grants)). Each year AWDC sponsors a narcotics detection dog, and numerous grants for equipment such as temperature alarms, remote door poppers, and bite suits.

There is also an organization called K9 Working Dogs International that offers financial assistance through the awarding of grants. These grants are specifically awarded to departments for the purchase of police canines. One such grant is available from the Law Enforcement Assistance Program. As a funding alternative, "The K9 LEAP Grant Program was developed to assist law enforcement agencies in overcoming budget restrictions, and the often times overwhelming costs associated with acquiring and deploying highly skilled, operationally efficient, working police service K9's" ("Police K9 Grants," n.d., para. 3).

Once the unit has been initially funded and implemented, a well-trained and

certified canine team will stand up in a court of law (Merritt, 2006). This has been illustrated and documented in *United States v Sundby* (1999), as well as *State of South Dakota v. Britton* (2009). This will aid in the prosecution of cases involving the canine's participation. The majority of those cases will potentially include lawful seizures that result in monetary gain for the department. Seized funds are applicable to ongoing funding of canine units. This is a simple, logical method of a canine unit self sustaining financially to maintain operating expenses. Seizure funds may also be utilized to purchase equipment and vehicles as the need arises. It should be noted that funds should be budgeted annually to cover operating expense; however, donations, grants and seizure funds should never be overlooked.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The researcher has determined, through research that the creation and implementation of a police canine unit has the ability to greatly benefit a law enforcement agency and its community. There are several areas of law enforcement that can and will be enhanced by the use of a well-trained canine team. Officers within the department will feel the immediate relief of a canine unit by having dogs available to assist them with calls such as building alarms / searches, narcotics detection, explosives detection, apprehension of suspects through their tracking abilities, and much more.

Canine units are also very appealing to the public. People relate to dogs because many dogs occupy a special place in homes across America. The results of a negative encounter with police officers may be reversed with a positive interaction with a canine unit at a police sponsored community services function. Canine



demonstrations are an excellent example of a service program that will reflect positively on the agency and its members. Because of people's affinity for dogs, these types of events normally draw a big crowd.

There are also challenges that come with a canine unit, including funds to implement a unit, if starting a unit from the ground up. These financial challenges can be overcome by utilizing alternative funding such as grants, as well as private donations from individuals and foundations. There are many funding options available to assist departments interested in starting and maintaining a canine unit. Asset forfeiture is also a viable option to aid in the implementation but more importantly to maintain the annual cost.

Another challenge is the liability issue. This is perhaps the most important issue to consider when making the decision to have a canine unit. This obstacle can be overcome in several ways. The best option is to have a plan and stay on track with that plan. Selection of the handler is perhaps the single most important part of combating liability. A good handler will minimize the liability risks involved with a canine unit. Training and certification on an annual basis will also minimize the risk associated from liability. Liability is a key factor in many parts of law enforcement. There is no method to eliminate liability completely. It will always exist. Law enforcement agencies must continually find ways to combat the problem by minimizing risks through whatever means necessary.

The researcher has determined, through this research, that the creation and implementation of a police canine unit has the ability to greatly benefit law enforcement agencies and their communities. While there are arguments to support and challenge

the implementation of canine units, the benefits greatly outweigh the risks involved.

Law enforcement agencies should consider creating and implementing canine units to aid their officers with their duties. This will prove to be an asset to not only the department but also the entire community.

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