

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Implementation of a Project Coordinator or Administrative Project  
Unit within Texas Law Enforcement Agencies**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Policing in the twenty-first century has become highly technical from the era of officers receiving their calls for service from call boxes to receiving them electronically over a mobile data computer or cell phone. With this evolution, the need for ordering specialized equipment and legal documentation needed for acquiring it has never been more apparent. Law enforcement agencies have relied on internal employees to order equipment, oversee projects, and write legal documents with little to no training. All law enforcement agencies should have a designated project coordinator or administrative unit to centralize the paperwork, ordering, receiving, supervising a project, or obtaining the appropriate equipment.

Due to a sworn officer or civilian employee assignment, they may be required to order their own equipment which will be utilized within their respective division, section, or unit. Employees can make an inordinate amount of mistakes due to lack of knowledge, lack of training, or poor guidance. Law enforcement agencies tend not to designate these duties to a designated person or unit due to personnel constraints, budgetary shortages, or outsourcing the task to someone else. Centralizing this process could bring continuity in ordering, receiving, and legal compliance in applying for and acquiring equipment. Instead of relying on the tried and true method of that is the way it has always been done, law enforcement agencies across Texas could improve their accountability, reliability, and fiscal responsibility. Police agencies should have a designated project person or section to oversee the various projects or equipment acquisitions to ensure the best interest of the citizens they serve and the departments they work for are met.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies across Texas have been ordering equipment and completing projects since their inception. Sworn police officers have been assigned the tasks of overseeing these projects, ordering equipment and being responsible for their conclusion. These police officers have varying backgrounds that may or may not pertain to the project they were assigned to oversee. Police agencies should have a designated project coordinator or administrative project unit to oversee the various projects or equipment acquisitions that occur within a police agency. Private sector examples will be used due to the relevance of the subject.

In the State of Texas, there are rules governing the types of paperwork needed in relation to the dollar amount of equipment, service, or property being purchased by a department. As an example, police departments across the state purchase squad cars for their officers. Because of the dollar amount, anything over \$50,000, a request for proposal (RFP) will be needed (Texas Local Government, 2014). The request for proposal is a document that is drafted by a municipality or police agency for, vendors or contractors, to submit their pricing and or experience bid for the requested equipment, service, or property (State of Texas, 2016). It is a legal document that governs how a municipality or department obtains the equipment or property in a proper and legal manner. Police officers across the state have been required to complete a competitive bid proposal if the dollar amount is above \$3,000 but less than \$50,000 for equipment, services, or property that fall within this pricing range (Texas Local Government Code, 2014). An example of this is the purchase of a single motorcycle. The competitive bid proposal is sent out to contractors, vendors, and companies who specialize in the

needed items for prices (State of Texas 2016). Police officers assigned to various units within a police agency are routinely asked to complete these proposals because they fall within their area of expertise, such as the traffic section preparing the written proposal for the single motorcycle, the patrol section preparing a request for proposal for this year's fleet of new squad cars, or the training section preparing a request for proposal for the yearly supply of ammunition needed throughout the department.

Law enforcement agencies across the state order needed equipment, services, and oversee projects on a daily basis. Officers and civilian employees order equipment and coordinate projects and services with little to no experience or guidance. They have been assigned these tasks because of a need within the agency. Police agencies could potentially begin to have difficulties when they allow employees, with specific job skills, order technical or complex equipment for their department or oversee projects when they have not been trained in the area of project management. By having several different employees handling these functions, agencies run the risk of ordering equipment that is incompatible with existing equipment, too complex for the end user, obtaining equipment that cannot be supported by other departments within the entity, or contractors not providing the purchased equipment or completing the project as the proposal was written. Police officers and civilian employees who are preparing the proposals, ordering the equipment, or controlling the projects or installation are still performing their day to day duties. By police organizations centralizing all projects and paperwork to a single employee or section, it can prevent inadvertent mistakes in ordering equipment that is not compatible with their existing equipment or ordering unnecessary items or equipment. The designated person or section would be able to

oversee the acquisition of the equipment or the completion of the project. They would provide a centralized point of contact for all police sections and municipal departments, ensure the correct paperwork is completed, submitted, and coordinate all contact and oversight of vendors and contractors.

## **POSITION**

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the need for a project coordinator or administrative project unit within law enforcement agencies to deal with ordering or obtaining specialized equipment, routine equipment, or services. Law enforcement has become a highly technical and specialized profession which requires the testing and ordering of new equipment such as mobile data computers (MDC), squad car overhead light bars, and mobile video cameras for squad cars. The ordering of commonly used items such as firearms, ammunition, uniforms, traffic cones, and flares are ordered on a yearly basis. Specialized equipment such as bomb robots, body microphones, night vision equipment, jail cameras, automated prisoner finger printer, and flash bang explosives are just a few of the specialized pieces of equipment within an agency. The examples listed are pieces of equipment which can be assigned to various divisions or sections within a police agency such as patrol, vice / narcotics unit, training section, traffic unit, property room section, jail section, bomb unit, and the special weapons and tactics unit. Due to the nature of an officer or civilian employee's assignment, they may be required to order their own equipment which will be utilized within their respective division, section, or unit. They may have technical expertise in their assignment but limited knowledge in the bid process. Employees can make a myriad of mistakes from

not understanding the bid process, copying previously used and or outdated request for proposal forms, or not understanding how to manage a project.

Police agencies and municipalities tend to operate in the same manner year after year. By allowing a single individual or designated unit to order equipment or manage a project, it would provide continuity within the agency as to what is being ordered and tighter control of budgetary expenditures. Other municipal or county departments, outside of the agency, may not get involved due to the technical or specialized nature of the equipment or service being ordered in the field of policing. With a potential lack of understanding or knowledge within other departments, mistakes may occur. The City of Oakland, California police department was audited by internal municipal auditors from 2006 to 2011, and it was discovered that they purchased over \$1.87 million dollars of equipment that they were unable to incorporate or use within the department (Kanhema, 2012). One of the projects that was identified pertained to a computer system within the agency that would bring all of the information held around the department into a searchable format for officers to use in their daily duties (Kanhema, 2012). The police department purchased equipment without enough thought as to what they wanted, the system was not compatible with their current equipment, enough funds were not set aside to implement the acquired systems, and the police department signed contracts without a bond to hold the vendors accountable (Kanhema, 2012). Oakland Police Chief, Howard Jordan, stated "Police officers aren't really that technical. We will hire IT staff and project managers to advise us" (Kanhema, 2012, p.1).

In 2004, the City of San Jose, California Police Department installed a new computer aided dispatch system in their department for \$4,731,437 (2004-2005 Santa

Clara Grand Jury Report, 2004). The chief of police had put together a committee of employees from within the police department and other city departments. No one on the committee had the needed expertise or skills to implement a project of this size (2004-2005 Santa Clara Grand Jury Report, 2004). A member of the police department's Technical Services Division was picked by the command staff as the project manager to oversee the entire project (2004-2005 Santa Clara Grand Jury Report, 2004). It was determined that the employee, placed in charge of the project, did not have knowledge in how to order or implement a project of this magnitude and there was no supervisor guidance or direction (2004-2005 Santa Clara Grand Jury Report, 2004). The police department was behind on the project and they hurried to meet the grant timeline because they thought that they were going to lose the funds that were paying for the project and the city would have to absorb the cost (2004-2005 Santa Clara Grand Jury Report, 2004). Because of a lack of knowledge in the grant process, the police department could have asked for an extension of the deadline in order to complete the project (2004-2005 Santa Clara Grand Jury Report, 2004). The residents of any municipality or entity entrust their police departments to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money. By having police officers who do not have adequate knowledge of the equipment they are ordering or the process in acquiring, it can do immeasurable harm to their community.

Once the decision has been made to proceed with the ordering of equipment or the supervision of the project commences, police officers and civilian employees are left with a complex issue of how to proceed. The Toronto Police Service believes that project management is one of the most important ingredients to ensure good use of the



limited taxpayer funds (Veneziano, 2010). After a project has been selected and a committee has been formed, several integral members on the committee are selected to receive project management training (Veneziano, 2010). The training is provided to the street level police officers, civilian employees, and command staff involved with the project so that everyone is aware of how the management of a project works, what is required, what can go wrong, and how it can succeed (Veneziano, 2010). Project leadership and project management are two important facets of a project. The Veterans Benefits Administration saw that it had a shortage of qualified project leaders and project managers to handle their information technology projects so they trained their own by using technical expertise within their organization and an outside training company (Kahaner, 2003). Agencies are being creative in solving their needs.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

In policing, there is widespread belief that officers and civilian employees can handle all of the responsibilities associated with a project from its initial beginning to its conclusion. By entrusting more employees to the process, careers may be enhanced through the knowledge they gain from the experience. Due to personnel constraints, police agencies cannot have a designated project person or section to solely oversee the various projects or equipment acquisitions that occur within an organization. Some police agencies and municipal entities have resorted to outsourcing their projects to private companies in order to have the project overseen by qualified vendors and contractors.

The economic crash of 2008 caused a significant impact on departments across the State of Texas and around the country. With personnel reductions and shrinking tax

bases, agencies have had to do more with less. Municipalities have sold land and buildings in an attempt to meet their budgetary obligations (Saulny, 2008). Police agencies did not fill vacant positions and other municipal departments cut employees and services where they could (Saulny, 2008). Cities lost valuable people and knowledge during that time because of budgetary unrests. Police chiefs had to do more projects in-house, using current employee expertise to deal with shrinking budgets. By using the current employees' expertise, the necessary equipment could still be ordered with minimal interruptions.

Police personnel would have the ability to use past request for proposals and written proposals as guides for the new equipment or needed service. The employee would have other members of the department, who may have completed the same or similar type paperwork, at their disposal for guidance. They would also have command staff members to assist with the supervision of the project and possibly be used as a resource. Facing the dilemma of reduced budgets, agencies are forced to initiate and complete their programs or they were not going to be done. The practice of in-house coordination could help to preserve the agency's bottom line.

As municipal finances get better, there is still a cautious climate concerning municipal and county budgets (Farmer, 2014b). By not dedicating a person or unit, due to personnel constraints, to oversee the research, acquisition of equipment or manage projects effectively can be monetarily costly to a police department and community. Officers many times do not take into account or plan for project overruns, change orders, overdue project time lines, manpower training, performance warranties, project warranties against failure, or service agreements. The inexperience and lack of

knowledge of the police officers can cause the taxpayers thousands or millions of dollars to correct mistakes.

The City of San Jose, California Police Department purchased a computer aided dispatch (CAD) system for its police and fire departments. The project ran over budget by \$2,716,454 and the Grand Jury concluded “The lack of expertise and citywide coordination in the procurement and implementation of the CAD system was costly. This resulted in public safety risk, officer safety issues, stressful working conditions, low morale, inefficiencies and a high price to the taxpayers of San Jose” (2004-2005 Santa Clara Grand Jury Report, 2004, p. 14). The City of Oakland, California Police Department used police officers to order their in-car video equipment and computer software. In 2007, officers spent \$1.2 million dollars on an in-car recording system that taped an officer’s actions around the city (Kanhema, 2012). The manufacturer closed their business and the officers never used the camera system (Kanhema, 2012). In 2007, officers purchased a computer software system which would track bad or illegal actions of its officers for \$65,000 dollars (Kanhema, 2012). It was never used by the department because the company that made the system was bought out and the new company wanted more money to implement the system (Kanhema, 2012). The officers of the Oakland Police Department also bought an automated ticket writing system in which officers could send their tickets straight to the court from their cars for \$81,866 dollars (Kanhema, 2012). The manufacturer closed their business and the officers never used the ticket writing system (Kanhema, 2012). Police agencies should not let unqualified personnel be the overriding factor in deciding, selecting, or managing the budget or taxpayer money.

Some agencies counter the designation of a project person or project unit by outsourcing certain projects or services in an attempt to get the most out of their budget. Police departments and municipalities have outsourced services to the private sector companies to save money (Nichols, 2010). The competitive bidding process on projects or services could generally result in lower cost and products and services designed for the specific job (Blackstone & Hakim, 1996). Outsourcing occurs when an agency contracts or hires a company, vendor, or contractor to implement a project or perform a service the agency once did (Nichols, 2010). Since the 1980's, entities such as the U.S. Government to low populated municipalities have been outsourcing services to the public (Nichols, 2010). Neighboring police agencies or municipalities could pool their needs together for the same equipment or service such as squad cars, fleet vehicles, or vehicle maintenance and get a better price because of the volume (Niccolls, 2016). Each entity could have their own contract to maintain autonomy and accountability for municipal property (Niccolls, 2016). The savings could be beneficial to an agency that takes the time to think their objective through, focus on the goal, and have a reputable outsource company (Niccolls, 2016).

A rebuttal to outsourcing police projects or services is the lack of project supervision and management employed by the soliciting agency or entity. Entities that have thrived in outsourcing that have created a standalone unit within the organization that manages and supervises all outsourced projects from the inception to its conclusion (Nichols, 2010). The agencies that fail to research the project, investigate the qualifications of the selected vendor for credit worthiness and ability to do the job, and don't oversee the project on a daily basis could result in huge monetary loses for the

agency (Nichols, 2010). In 2009, the State of Texas entered into an \$863,000,000 dollar outsourcing service contract with IBM and then terminated it after an audit uncovered the poor supervision of the project, lack of employee guidance and work product of the Texas Department of Information Resources (Nichols, 2010). An audit by the New York State Comptroller, in 2009, discovered two outsourced development contracts from 1997 and 2000 projects not completed between the City of Niagara Falls and two developers because the city did not oversee and supervise the projects (Nichols, 2010). Agencies should enter into a contract with an outsourcing firm or specialist to give entity unbiased information on the project and vendor (Nichols, 2010). Susan Duerksen, Director of Communication for In the Public Interest, pointed out a company motive “is not the common good; it’s profit. If they can cut corners in any way, they often do” (Nichols, 2010, p. 2).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

One of the basic tenants in policing is the public trust. The trust of the public can be hard to gain or maintain and easy to lose. With the increasing technological advancements in police equipment, agencies are continuously looking for new ways to police communities with fewer personnel. Due to the complexities in the process of acquiring equipment and managing projects throughout the agencies, a centralized unit or person should be established. Police agencies have relied on the tried and true method of that is the way it has always been done. Placing officers and civilian employees in charge of projects and ordering equipment, because the needed equipment or project falls within their division or section, should be curtailed or eliminated.

Placing an employee in a position to coordinate and oversee a project with little to no knowledge or experience, in how the system or process works, is ill-advised. The officer should be able to ensure that the request for proposal or the written proposal is written correctly and the agency receives everything from the vendor that it ordered. The project manager, from the agency, would also be able to ensure that the original proposal was written in a manner that would protect the city from a vendor defaulting or going bankrupt. A lack of knowledge could cause serious damage to the department's budget and credibility. The lack of knowledge and experience can also translate to the municipalities elected officials. A retire city employee was elected to the city council and then he became the finance committee chairman over a \$3 billion city budget with no experience (Farmer, 2014a). The councilman wondered if a fortune 500 company would do that (Farmer, 2014a).

Agencies and municipalities must make a conscious effort to train their employees in the complexities of obligating their department or city to an ill-fated project. Police officers and civilian employees receive training on a regular basis, concerning their position, but specialized training should be developed and implemented to serve the needs of the department in the area of equipment acquisition or project management. Agencies should look to other sections of municipal government such as purchasing departments, general services departments, or local merchants to help develop a training program. Municipalities can also look to state comptrollers to help train and navigate the complex issues of finance and budgeting (Farmer, 2014a).

Police departments have had to deal with reduced budgets and manpower since 9/11 (Irwin, 2011). In dealing with financial constraints placed upon agencies, it was economical to do all of the ordering of equipment and project management using current employees. A lot of agencies were not allowed to hire officers let alone specialized experts (Irwin, 2011). Some departments have developed, implemented, and managed their own programs and projects with little to no issues for years. It is believed that the current employees are capable of handling the project from beginning to end. In contrast to this point, the amount of money lost because of the lack of manpower or the hiring of experts can be staggering. The City of Oakland, California Police Department lost approximately \$1.87 million dollars due to lack of manpower and the refusal to hire experts (Kanhema, 2012). The City of Portland, Oregon did not have the appropriate amount of staff allocated to a project, due to budgetary constraints, and they were several years over the deadline and \$10 million dollars over budget on the installation of a computer aided dispatch system (Kanaracus, 2013).

Some agencies have looked at outsourcing some of their police service to save money. The concept has been used in the area of trash collecting. An analysis has to be completed to ensure that the outsourcing of a service is in the best interest of the department and the entity (Nichols, 2010). Designated supervision of the contractors and the services being supplied is a key to a good outsourcing project (Nichols, 2010). Supervision and project management is also the Achilles heel of outsourcing because agencies that do not monitor the vendors closely for compliance, projects can get away from the department (Nichols, 2010). Because of manpower shortage or the inability to

hire a full-time project monitor, employees are left to monitor the projects in between their regular duties.

Due to the complexity and legal requirements involved with purchasing large dollar amounts of equipment, police must look at streamlining their process to avoid the countless number of problems that can beset a project. The ability to hold contractors, other departments, and internal employees accountable should be of the utmost importance to an agency or municipality. Police departments should implement the designated project person or project section to provide continuity and legal conformity within the agency in the area of purchasing equipment or overseeing projects. With the implementation of this measure, other city departments and vendors will have a designated person to contact for questions and consultations. Officers and civilian employees will be free to perform their regular duties without handling additional duties they were not trained for. The designated person can pay close attention to the ordering and dissemination of the equipment to the appropriate divisions or units. Through training and experience, the person or unit can ensure that the best interest of the department, the city, and the citizens are served.



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