

Public Safety Response Team Program

Henrico County, Virginia

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM -

This innovative new program provides a unified rapid response team from a diverse cadre' of police services to address community problems that require an immediate law enforcement response due to their threat to public safety. The Public Safety Response Team Program is unique in that its focus is a rapid and immediate response to community crime problems through the application of innovative strategies, rather than conventional police methods that rely on a reactive response, or "domino effect," from uniformed, investigative, and crime prevention services. Because the Response Team is staffed with command staff and personnel experienced in problem-solving initiatives, they are better able to utilize unconventional methods and strategies to target crime suspects having a negative impact on the community.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM -

A. SCANNING:

During the year 2000, the Division of Police was faced with a growing number of unique community crime problems throughout the County. This growth in the number of unique crime complaints was unprecedented and was cause for alarm because of the negative impact that the *fear* of crime was having on the quality of life in our communities.

Faced with a dramatic increase in community crime complaints and no staffing increases available, it was incumbent upon the Commander of Uniform Operations (Eastern

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District) and the Commander of Organized Crime to develop an innovative program utilizing existing resources that would have a positive impact on these complaints. The idea was to take a cadre' of experienced problem-solving command staff and support personnel and have them focus exclusively on crime-related community problems by meeting on a weekly basis, and responding to them quickly through the use of a multitude of police and County services. These services consisted of partnerships with Federal Law Enforcement Agencies, partnerships with County Building Inspections and Community Maintenance Departments, and "team-building" within the Division of Police.

In 2000, the **Public Safety Response Team Program** was born with the development of weekly "crime meetings" that bring together all enforcement and crime prevention unit commanders. The purpose of these meetings is to identify potential crime trends developing in the community. Once a potential crime trend is detected, one of two Assistant Chiefs of Police activates the Public Safety Response Team and directs and coordinates the appropriate operational commanders in a problem-solving initiative to respond and terminate the problem. Within a month of its implementation, the merits and usefulness of this program were clearly apparent with the impact the Response Team had in resolving one of the most serious residential public safety problems the department has ever faced. By the end of 2000, the Public Safety Response Team Program had successfully intervened in a myriad of community crime problems and completely ended their threat to the residential and business community at large.

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B.ANALYSIS:

The mission of the program is: To intervene in those crime trends which require an immediate law enforcement response due to their threat to the community or to public safety, through weekly crime meetings and through the activation of a rapid response team of trained problem-solving police personnel. The goalsandobjectives of the program are:

- To identify chronic crime problems, trends, or complaints within the community that may be of an immediate threat to public safety.
- To look specifically at crime trends in cooperation with the department's Community Crime Officers and Community Officers and subsequently have an impact on street crimes that may be affecting their areas.'
- To analyze existing intelligence on the problem or complaint and develop short-term strategies to eliminate the problem.
- Implement strategies using all available tactics and resources within and outside the department, focusing not on separate initiatives but on "team-building".
- To continuously monitor the community to deter and react to developing crime trends.

C.RESPONSE:

The time frame for development and implementation of the program can be immediate by prioritizing existing resources and devoting a limited number of command staff and personnel to both Community Policing and Problem Solving Policing strategies targeting street crime.

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The following time frame was utilized by this agency without impacting the current level of services provided:

- **Program implementation** - Mandatory weekly crime meetings for all enforcement commanders established.
- **One to Two Months** - Intelligence and enforcement unit commanders are required to prepare and present weekly crime reports focusing on identified crime trends. The focus is not on past performance, but work plans for the coming week with appropriate recommendations for responding to developing trends.
- **Six Months to One Year** - Assistant Chiefs of Investigative and Uniform Operations activate the Public Safety Response Team as community crime trends are identified. Response strategies are developed and implemented using all necessary resources until crime trend is terminated.
- **After One Year** - The protocol and culture of weekly crime meetings has been firmly established and Response Team activation becomes more rapid and effective as crime trends are identified earlier and methodologies are streamlined and become more efficient.

The number of command staff and officers needed to duplicate the Public Safety Response Team Program would be dependent on department size, department staffing resources, and the department's commitment to unconventional community problem-solving policing strategies.

The *clientele being served* within the department are the Community Officers, Community Crime Officers, and Uniformed Officers who may lack the training and expertise to carry out short-term problem-solving initiatives. Outside the department the **Public Safety Response**

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Team Program serves the public to enhance the quality of life in our community and reduce the fear of crime.

The County 'srole in devising and implementing the program was demonstrated in their support of all department initiatives involving Community Policing and Problem Solving Policing that have a positive impact on the quality of life for our citizens. As of the date of this application, there have been no partnerships initiated with other state or federal agencies on this program other than contributions made by federal law enforcement agencies in responding to criminal violations of federal law.

D. ASSESSMENT:

This program has relied on GIS mapping, state-of-the-art audio and video surveillance equipment, electronic tracking equipment interfaced with radio scanning technology, aircraft, crime trend mapping and projection methods calculated from intelligence crime data bases, a new 800 MHz. police radio system, and a new 800 MHz. police robbery/burglary alarm system interfaced with that radio system.

There was noadditional cost associated with this program. Because the program merely changed the goals and objectives of existing staff resources and utilized existing police equipment, the department and the county avoided any unbudgeted expenses associated with it. Salaries and benefits remained unchanged for the command staff and officers assigned to the program and no additional equipment was needed.

The potential for success of the **Public Safety Response Team Program** was realized soon after it was created during the summer of 2000, as seen in the following narrative of an actual community crime problem that posed a threat to the safety of a residential neighborhood:

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During the spring of 2000, a residence on Watts Lane in the eastern District of Henrico County, became a matter of concern for the Division of Police due to the level of criminal activity occurring in and around the home. The activity, ranging from promiscuous shootings inside and outside the home, drug dealing, youths blocking streets, verbal threats to neighbors and to police officers, fortification of the home to protect the occupants from police intervention, the placement of tents in the front yard for "look-outs " for the police, and reports of weapons being stock piled in the home for use against the police, had created a level of fear that virtually paralyzed the community. During the 4th quarter of 1999, this one residence was the source of 25 calls for service to the police and the catalyst for numerous special assignments, which required a large commitment of manpower and resources that could not be used elsewhere in the community.

Through weekly crime meetings the following became evident: The residents of this home were operating in a "gray-area" in terms of concealing the majority of their criminal activity, they were discretely building up a large cache of weapons through "straw purchases" at local gun shows, by retreating to the security of their home upon police arrival to avoid arrest, and by attempting to lure the police into over-reacting through overwhelming verbal abuse, intimidation, and veiled threats.

*The Public Safety **Response** Team was activated and all available police and county resources were committed under the direction of the Assistant Chief of Investigative Operations and the Captain of Uniform Operations (Eastern District). The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms was brought in because it was determined that the majority of the criminal behavior centered on the stockpiling and distribution of guns from the home. Historical files*

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were prepared on the property and suspects, strategies were initiated, and action was taken in the form of a multi-agency search warrant that targeted violations of federal gun laws, state and county laws, tax law violations, building code violations, zoning violations, and other community maintenance issues.

As a result of the Public Safety Response Team's intervention in the "Watts Lane Initiative, " there has been a 100% reduction in police calls for service to this residence.
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From the quarter of 1999 to the time of intervention in 2000, police calls for service to this community crime problem were reduced to zero. In addition, Uniform Operations (Eastern District) was able to suspend all special surveillances and preventive patrols targeting this residence which tied up considerable resources.

*This reduction can be credited to the rapid activation of the Public Safety **Response Team** to find innovative ways to respond and eliminate the source of these complaints. The Response Team worked in conjunction with the following components: Community Officers, Community Crime Officers, Uniformed Officers, the Organized Crime Section, Criminal Investigations, Crime Prevention, Animal Protection, the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the U.S. Attorney's Office, Building Inspections, and Planning and Zoning. Over 40 weapons were seized, several occupants were imprisoned, and the remaining occupants are awaiting trial on Federal crimes.*

Dramatic results can also be seen in the number of crime trends eliminated and attributed directly to the **Public Safety Response Team Program** during calendar year 2000:

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- **Larceny from Auto Crime Spree Hits Eastern Henrico** -During the summer of 2000, the community experienced an unusually severe problem with larcenies from autos and vandalisms to autos in eastern Henrico. The weekly crime meetings quickly identified this trend which occurred over a matter of weeks. 40 larcenies from autos and 29 vandalisms occurred in one police patrol area alone, and the number was growing daily. The **Public Safety Response Team Program** was activated by the Assistant Chief of Investigative Operations who directed Uniform Operations, Investigative Operations, and Strike Force personnel to develop strategies. Within weeks, six suspects were arrested, 48 larcenies from auto were cleared, 48 vandalisms to auto were cleared, including one act of \$10,000 in damage to a piece of construction equipment, and the crime spree came to an abrupt **halt**.
- **Commercial Break-In "Smash & Grab" Suspect Terrorizes Business Community** - During the fall of 2000, it became apparent that the County was experiencing a possible pattern of commercial break-ins where front glass windows and doors were knocked out and businesses were burglarized. Thirteen commercial break-ins had occurred and crime projections were developed. Once again the Assistant Chief of Investigative Operations activated the **Public Safety Response Team** and within two days, the lone suspect was apprehended and confessed to all 13 commercial break-ins and several in other jurisdictions.
- **Public Safety Response Team Remains Active after Break-In Arrest** - After the apprehension of the "smash & grab" suspect mentioned above, it could not be determined if the commercial break-in problem had been completely resolved. As a result, it was

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decided not to deactivate the Public Safety Response Team. Within a week of that decision, the Response Team made another arrest during an in progress commercial break-in at an area Dairy Queen, which uncovered a highly sophisticated group of juvenile and adult suspects who had been unknown to the police up until that time. As a result of leaving the Public Safety Response Team active due to the potential for multiple crime trends occurring, another crime trend was eliminated with over 40 indictments being obtained against the suspects.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION -

- + County staff (Police Personnel) played a significant role in developing and implementing the program with no outside assistance.
- + The Program offers a new service to county residents by providing an improved response methodology to crime-related community problems and fills a gap in the availability of existing services which focused on long-term investigations involving separate responses from a multitude of components.
- The **Program** enhances the cost effectiveness of an existing county government program by improving service with no additional increase in budgeted funds.
- The Program upgrades the level of training for new police commanders and officers by providing an in-house indoctrination program in which they can learn and practice the most innovative techniques and strategies in problem-solving policing strategies.
- The **Program** promotes intergovernmental cooperation and coordination in addressing shared problems affecting public safety by bringing together Uniformed Patrol Officers, Organized Crime Investigators, Criminal Investigators, Community Officers, Community

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Crime Officers, Community Maintenance Officers, Building Inspections, Planning and Zoning, and the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office on crime-related community problems.

- The **Program** was not created in response to a federal or state law, regulation, or order.
- The **Program** has measurable results that encompass cost-effective use of existing resources, improved constituent service, and better intergovernmental cooperation.
- The **Program** is innovative in that it focuses on a rapid and immediate response to community crime trends and problems much as Police SWAT teams respond to "high-risk" situations, through weekly crime meetings, identification of crime trends, and activation of a **Public Safety Response Team**. Traditional law enforcement practices involve a series of individual responses by a multitude of law enforcement components often acting in isolation or independent from one another.
- All aspects of the **Program** are consistent with acceptable governmental and financial management practices and promote general governmental accountability.

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