

**Los Angeles Police Department
Operations-Valley Bureau
Violent Crime Task Force**

**A Model for Large Metropolitan Police Agencies in Efficiently and Productively
Addressing Street Level Violent Crime**



**2009 Herman Goldstein Award for
Excellence in Problem Oriented Policing**

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LAPD/OVB Violent Crime Task Force: A Model for Large Metropolitan Police Agencies in Efficiently and Productively Addressing Street Level Violent Crime

SUMMARY

Scanning

More than half of the city of Los Angeles' land area lies within the San Fernando Valley, and is covered by one of the four Geographic Police Bureaus. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and, specifically, Operations-Valley Bureau (OVB), faced the challenge of not only providing timely police service, but also establishing a capability whereby a sufficient resource of uniformed police units could be dedicated to providing a swift and effective response to emerging crime problems.

Analysis

This approach reflects a coordinated effort between the administrative offices that oversee the allocation of police officer positions and the on-going continued support of commanding officers at a variety of levels within the organization.

Response

With the support of the Chief of Police and the dedicated oversight of additional police managers, the Violent Crime Task Force (VCTF) was created. This Unit did not entail the creation of new police officer positions beyond the confines of the annual budget. Instead, a creative management approach was brought to bear on emerging violent crime trends affecting the community of the San Fernando Valley.

Assessment

The result has been the establishment of a unit from the existing pool of police officers and supervisors with no adverse impact on day-to-day police services. Time and time again this unit has demonstrated a high degree of efficiency and direct impact on violent street crime.

Since the inception of the Violent Crime Task Force, OVB has experienced an increase in arrest and a decrease in crime.

	2007	2008	2009 (YTD)
• Violent Crime	-5%	-6%	-10%
• Arrests	4%	0%	5%

The formation of this Unit can be viewed as a Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (SARA) problem. It identified the strategic crime problem of violent crimes across a large geographic area. It yielded a highly effective tactical resolution that retains the flexibility to provide an immediate response to developing crime trends and dedicates resources to the street level work required to stop further crime and arrest perpetrators.

BACKGROUND

During the tenure of Chief of Police William J. Bratton, the Los Angeles Police Department (Department) has enjoyed a steady decline in violent street crime. A philosophy of creativity and willingness to reach beyond conventional measures has directly yielded significant results in crime reduction. Geographically, the Department is divided into four bureaus that have specific designated responsibilities to provide police service across the City, which spans nearly 500 square miles. These bureaus are identified as South, Central, West, and Valley.

Each bureau is commanded by a Deputy Chief who reports to the Chief of Police. The focus of this paper rests with Operations-Valley Bureau, which oversees the police services to the various communities throughout the San Fernando Valley, within the city limits of Los Angeles.

This geographic bureau was initially composed of six patrol divisions and a traffic division. Recently, due to the growing population of the San Fernando Valley, a seventh patrol division was established to raise the effectiveness and efficiency of police services.

Policing the San Fernando Valley has always presented unique challenges due to a variety of factors which are shared by many large metropolitan police departments. Specifically, this bureau is bordered and dissected by large freeway systems that not only present challenges to timely call response during peak travel hours, but also provide rapid egress for fleeing criminals.

In a similar vein, the freeway system and abundance of primary roadways facilitates criminals with vehicles perpetrating their crimes across artificial organizational and city boundaries.

Additionally, the population of the San Fernando Valley is composed of all socio-economic levels. Crime trends can spike in affluent neighborhoods, as well as the dense population clusters found in and around low-income high-density apartment complexes. In all cases, the

crimes tend to be opportunistic, and can share a violent component within the modus operandi. In many cases, a degree of street gang involvement is found, which is more predominant when addressing illicit street-level drug trade and disputed turf boundaries. The patrol divisions are spread out across the valley and are tasked with call response to the various business and residential communities. These units predominantly spend their day responding to one radio call after another. The volume of calls, coupled with the travel time, leaves very little time for the individual patrol unit to actively “work” on a developing crime problem that may be recurring within a defined area of the community.

SCANNING and ANALYSIS

In 2006, the San Fernando Valley was experiencing an upward trend in violent crime, and gang-related crime was on the rise. In an effort to stem escalating crime, the Chief of Police authorized the deployment of 35 additional sworn officers to Operations-Valley Bureau.

At this time, there was discussion as to whether or not the additional officers should be assigned to the patrol divisions with the highest crime occurrences.

Invariably, the assignment of additional officers to the patrol division can simply translate into the addition of another radio car or other unforeseen reassignment, which was either off-task or misdirected away from the intended objective. As a large organization, it is a reality that even smaller units tethered to local patrol divisions have a tendency to lose their focus. They become intermittently consumed by seemingly urgent crime problems that may or may not contribute to the overall effort from a bureau perspective.

As a result, the Commanding Officer, OVB, determined that the most effective manner to use these 35 extra officers was to form a bureau-level task force that would address violent crime issues throughout the Valley. A lieutenant was selected to organize, develop and administer the task force, with the help of five police supervisors to provide line supervision. The task force was supplemented by 10 motorcycle officers and four collision investigation officers to bring this group to 50 sworn officers. A Senior Clerk Typist was selected to provide administrative support. In two weeks, the infrastructure and logistics to support this task force was established. Facilities, vehicles and equipment were secured and administrative systems and procedures were established to ensure a task force of this size was adequately equipped and properly managed.

It was all completed in an extremely efficient and thorough manner; therefore, the Violent Crime Task Force was launched.

RESPONSE

The mission of the Task Force has been to coordinate and deploy operational resources in response to emerging violent crime trends, clusters, and spikes to achieve a five percent reduction within OVB for 2009. Deployed seven days a week, the flexibility, adaptability, and mobility of this Task Force provides the means to quickly deploy up to four squads of officers to specific crime areas in a variety of different configurations. Through daily analysis of crime intelligence, some of the enforcement and prevention strategies employed are:

- Uniformed Crime Suppression
- Plain vehicle enforcement
- Motor officer deployment
- Foot beat deployment
- Surveillance
- Warrant Service
- Extensive follow-up investigations (“roll backs”)
- Parole/Probation compliance checks

The officers assigned to the VCTF have developed relationships with key stakeholders. They develop relationships with the community to learn about criminal behavior. They gain community cooperation and develop valuable leads by being responsive to particular problems. Cooperation and trust does not stop with the community. Officers communicate with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to ensure that criminal aliens are properly

handled. They consistently involve the California Department of Corrections Parole Office and the Los Angeles County Probation Department in each applicable arrest and/or investigation.

The best arrests are worthless without successful prosecution, conviction, and sentencing.

The supervisory staff and Task Force leadership have cultivated and maintained solid relationships with the City and District Attorneys' Offices to ensure that mutual needs are met.

This undoubtedly keeps career criminals behind bars, thereby contributing to crime reduction.

Another great strategy embraced by Task Force officers is the use of a parole/probation compliance check, or "roll back." A significant percentage of the arrests, guns and narcotics recovered are from roll backs. When officers make an arrest for a violation, they do not stop there. The officers will take the suspect back to his/her residence and through consent or warrant, are able to regularly obtain additional evidence that often links suspects to other crimes that otherwise would go undetected. Through excellent training and supervisory oversight, additional criminal leads are also developed through regular debriefings. Whether through the use of electronic surveillance or the cultivation of information, the Task Force uses all tools available. It is common for Department managers to discuss the significant accomplishments of the officers assigned to this Task Force.

Officers assigned to the VCTF embrace the importance of following every lead and investigation to its conclusion. They repeatedly investigate violent crimes where there is limited suspect information. They use available information resources to identify and locate the suspect, often resulting in an arrest within hours instead of the normal weeks or months later. Timely arrests of suspects prevent them from committing additional crimes.

The VCTF has been able to maintain very high productivity, with integrity and a genuine enthusiasm for this assignment. The morale of this group is consistently high, as evidenced by productivity, exceptional attendance, and the desire to remain in the unit. Working for VCTF has become a coveted position. Everyone knows that only the best are chosen to work the detail, and once in, they must continue to perform at an exceptional standard to remain.

ASSESSMENT

The Task Force was the first of its kind, and the year-end results were phenomenal. The VCTF definitely contributed to reversing the rising violent crime trend in the San Fernando Valley. Certainly, without the astonishing productivity results, the Valley would not have been as safe. On many occasions, they are asked to assist detectives with their follow up investigations. Each time, they responded enthusiastically and, more times than not, are successful in fulfilling the detectives' requests. In addition, Task Force officers search for, and find many violent crime suspects that are wanted and identified in OVB Area wanted bulletins. They develop expertise relating to Valley gangs and share this intelligence with Area detectives and gang units. To be sure, officers assigned to the Violent Crime Task Force have contributed significantly to the reduction in violent crime in the San Fernando Valley.

Following the formation of the Violent Crime Task Force in 2007, the unit made 947 felony arrests, 1570 misdemeanor arrests, 291 arrests of gang members, and 112 rollbacks. Also, 114 guns were seized. This effort was noteworthy and Chief Bratton commented on the effectiveness of the unit as compared with like workgroups in the Department.

The success of the unit has continued throughout its second full year. During 2008, the VCTF made 1,271 felony arrests, 1,716 misdemeanor arrests, 259 arrests of gang members, conducted 197 rollbacks and seized 77 guns. (Chart 1)

Chart 1 - VCTF Arrest Stats – Year End Comparison

	YTD 2007	YTD 2008	Percent Change
Felonies	947	1,271	+24.1%
Misdemeanors	1,570	1,716	+3.3%
Guns Recovered	114	77	-36.8%
Rollbacks	112	197	+75.0%
Gang Member Arrests	291	259	-15.5%
Juvenile Arrests	132	649	+391.7%
Avg. Assigned Officers/DP	48	47	
Avg. Arrests per Officer	52.43	59.51	+13.5%

Compared to 2007, the productivity of the unit increased over 24% in felony arrests.

Additionally, when considering individual effort in 2008, the average officer assigned to the unit arrested more than 59 persons in pursuit of the mission to interdict violent street crime.

That marks an increase of over 13%.

As stated in the opening of this nomination package, to date in 2009, if the officers continue their efforts, this year's efforts will yet again raise the bar for their annual performance. Within the first five months of this year, the VCTF has made 522 felony arrests, 503 misdemeanor arrests and 101 arrests of gang members. The Unit has conducted 120 rollbacks and seized 18 guns, including 3 AK-47's. (Chart 2)

Chart 2 - Projected VCTF Unit Performance for 2009 vs. 2008

	YTD 2008	YTD 2009	Percent Change
Felonies	385	522	+35.6%
Misdemeanors	523	503	-3.8%
Guns Recovered	29	18	-37.9%
Rollbacks	59	120	+103.4%
Gang Member Arrests	108	101	-6.5%

CONCLUSION

The Violent Crime Task Force is the epitome of a specialized unit using the SARA model to perform their duties. Each day, prior to the daily briefing, supervisors use Department resources to gather the information that will determine where units are to be assigned. Resources include crime analysis mapping and daily crime update reports from each patrol division. These resources tell supervisors where crimes are being committed, the time of day they are being committed, and provide suspect descriptions. Supervisors then analyze the information and determine how to best address the identified crime problems and locations. Officers meet with Parole or Probation officers to determine if those they oversee may be contributing to crime problems. After identifying and determining how to best address these crime problems, officers hit the streets. Having previously decided the best method of responding to these crime problems, officers can use motel checks, warrants, compliance checks, or direct crime suppression to attack these problems. At the end of each day, the VCTF numbers say it all. As supervisors assess the success of the activities, they can determine where more needs to be done, if they need to continue addressing the problem, or whether it has been a success. The greatest indicator of success is the actual reduction in crime, which is determined by meeting with divisional detectives, or when consulting other Department resources.

Operating without scandal or controversy, the Violent Crime Task Force leadership recognized the importance of regularly discussing corruption awareness, and the importance of treating everyone with respect. Constitutional policing is a mantra. Throughout the year, officers maintain exemplary attendance; demonstrate extraordinary commitment and tremendous dedication to duty and sense of teamwork. They are often called upon to change work schedules

and are regularly asked to work weekends and long hours. All of them continuously provide outstanding service and dedication to duty with contagious enthusiasm.

The efforts of the Operations-Valley Bureau Violent Crime Task Force improve the quality of life in the San Fernando Valley by greatly contributing to reducing violent crime and achieving the goal of a five-percent reduction in violent crime. By deploying the SARA model of policing, officers within the VCTF are not just adhering to a community policing mantra. They are ensuring that the citizens of the San Fernando Valley are more than just safe; they feel safe.