

WHAT IMPACT WILL PERSONNEL SHORTAGES HOLD FOR LAW
ENFORCEMENT'S RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR SERVICE IN THE FUTURE?

Article

By

Lieutenant Kevin C Finnerty
Modesto Police Department

Command College Class XXXIV

Sacramento, California

November 2003

WHAT IMPACT WILL PERSONNEL SHORTAGES HOLD FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT'S RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR SERVICE IN THE FUTURE?

By: Kevin C. Finnerty

Enforcing the law is no longer the bread and butter of the profession, but one task among many that is provided to the community. Officers are teachers and counselors; they work to preserve neighborhoods' tranquility through conflict resolution teams and restorative policing collaborations. In addition, they are crime prevention advisors to private industry and community advocates.

If you were to poll the average law enforcement agency, you would discover that there are services provided by that agency that are not traditionally law enforcement's responsibility, but are nonetheless, beneficial to the community. DARE programs, Mental Health Restorative Policing Programs, School Police Officer Programs, and community citizen academies are but a few that come to mind.

Nobody will argue that as police agencies diversify, their breadth of community outreach is enhanced. However, when human capital is in scarce supply due to societal and economic influences, the question becomes more focused and specifically, "How will personnel shortages impact law enforcement's response to calls for service in a mid-sized agency by 2008?" For the purposes of this discussion, calls for service are the overt and subtle requests to handle the vast range of incidents affecting the community's sense of security and safety.

This article will address the question in several ways. First, there are many influences vying for law enforcement's attention; those will be identified and discussed.

Secondly, the application of strategic planning, thinking, and management transition and budgeting will be explored. Finally, there will be the call to action. So let's begin!

The police profession is a reflection of society's soul. A reflection of the political leaders, reformers, scholars, community leaders, and police executives who have shaped the profession to deal with a range of social problems such as immigration, population growth, urbanization, racism, poverty, gender bias, fiscal challenges and technological change as well as crime (Vila, 1999. P. 24). As such, the profession is forever changing to meet the demands of a forever changing society.

Law enforcement is more of an art than a science, but always responsive to the desires of society. The influences tugging at law enforcement's scarcest of resources, personnel, are many and come from every aspect of society.

One such influence on calls for service is technology, the 9-1-1 system. Like so many other problems, 9-1-1 started out as a solution. In 1967, the presidential Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice recommended that a single number should be established nationwide for reporting emergencies. AT&T soon announced its choice of 9-1-1, and the first 9-1-1 call was made in Haleyville, Ala., in February 1968. Today, the 9-1-1 system covers some 85 percent of the population in the United States.

However, the 9-1-1 system's success came with a price for law enforcement. Reported in the U.S. World Report article "This is 9-1-1 ... Please Hold" (June 17, 1996) the number of 9-1-1 calls started growing in the 1970s and has mushroomed to an estimated 268,000 a day nationwide in 1996. The sheer volume of calls is not the only problem. An ever-increasing percentage of 9-1-1 calls do not fit anyone's definition of an

emergency. Landmark research in several cities has found that most of the calls in which officers are dispatched - 50 to 90 percent in most places - are not about crime. In addition, fewer than 5 percent of most cities' total dispatched calls are made quickly enough for officers to intervene or make an arrest.

Researchers concluded these problems with 9-1-1 system were brought about because the system was sold too aggressively and the police failed to teach the public how to use it properly. Secondly, 9-1-1 is convenient and easy to use. Finally, policing strategies of the past encouraged the police to respond to all calls for service, emergency or not (Witkin, Gordon, Monica Guttman, and Tracey Lenzy, 1996, pp. 30-37).

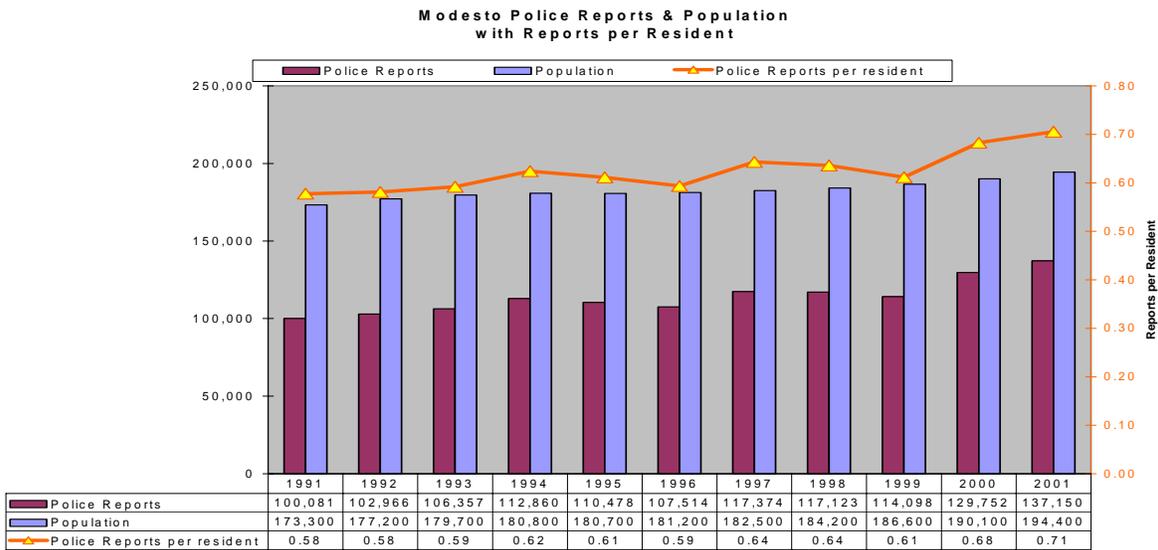
Candace Caviglia, supervisor with the Stanislaus County Regional 9-1-1 Communications Center in the City of Modesto, California, concurs. Today, the issue before us is how to wean the public off frivolous 9-1-1 calls. The police profession must sort out the non-emergencies and service the public in ways other than by having an officer respond to non-emergency incidents.

Another influence on calls for service is social: population growth. Stanislaus County's (California) growth rate from July 2001 to July 2002 was the third among the 58 counties within the state with a growth rate of 3.5 percent. The surrounding counties' growth rates were 3.1 to 3.4 percent. Contributing factors impacting local municipal government services are those populations traveling to Stanislaus County for business and pleasure activities [Carlson, Ken (April 17, 2003)].

Accompanying the increase of the population is the increase in crime. In The American Demographics, November 1990 issue, data from the Census Bureau and the FBI was used to examine the link between growth and serious crime as reported in the

FBI's Crime Index. The analysis found that 10 of the 15 fastest growing states were also among the 15 states with the highest crime rates. Seven of the ten fastest-growing states are in the top ten for crime rates. Of those, California was number five in growth and number six in crime. (Exter, Thomas and Joe Schwartz. Nov 1990, v12, n11, pp. 24-25).

In a study conducted by the Modesto Police department in 2002, there was a correlation between population growth and the number of reports per resident.ⁱ As illustrated in the graph below, as the population increased, so did the number of requests for service.



This graph demonstrates that as the population increased in the city of Modesto, so did the number of requests for service.

The economy is another influence that affects the management of calls for service. Law enforcement's employee services, including salaries and wages, compensated time off cashouts, holiday cashouts, overtime payments, meal allowances, and employee leave reimbursement and benefits, accounted for approximately 88.45% of an agency's budget. When a department needs to reduce costs due to budget constraints,

the savings will inevitably be through the reduction in staffing or eliminating special programs such as DARE.

The influences of the environment in which the agency thrives should be considered when addressing calls for service response protocols. In the Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 2000, survey data infers that the United States' population has a greater concern for social issues, such as taxation, medical care, ethical and moral teachings within the family unit, and single parent families, than for crime and violence. The information provided by the sourcebook supports data published by the Gallop Poll stating that the law enforcement profession enjoys a moderate level of confidence from the public and is held in good regard as to the delivery of services and treatment of the communities' citizens (Gallop, George Jr. No. 396, p34). The information infers the environment in which most law enforcement agencies operate supports the role of law enforcement officer, but the environment also has a greater concern for social issues other than crime fighting.

Finally, a constant challenge for law enforcement will be in the political arena; the management of the tension between calls for service and proactive policing. Neglect either and the political influences will drive the focus of police service towards the other. Therefore, the profession must strike a balance between crime prevention-type activities and responding to calls for service.

Assessing the social, political, environmental, economical and political influences impacting the profession, the time is right for a change calls for service policing philosophies. A set of strategies that will address how personnel shortages will impact law enforcement's response to calls for service are:

- (1) The education of the community about the issue.
- (2) The development of an ad hoc committee to assess the community's service demands that must be addressed by law enforcement and those that could be managed by another government agency or private enterprise.
- (3) Re-evaluation of the call priority system and at the very least, developing criteria for emergency and non-emergency responses by law enforcement personnel.
- (4) The creation of a law enforcement call response team that interdicts when the initial calls for service are received in the communications center.
- (5) Promoting privatization of many police services such as alarm responses, DARE and School Police Officer programs, and subpoena service.
- (6) Using civilian personnel to manage or perform traditional police officer responsibility such as investigation and telephonic follow-up of misdemeanor "cold" calls for service, and criminal investigations.
- (7) Finally, a public safety tax initiative that allocates funding for law enforcement services.

The objectives for each strategy are, to begin with, to form a teaching cadre of members to host town meetings. This team's focus is to provide fiscal overview for the agency's revenue streams and expenditures, statistical data regarding service workload, staffing overview and service delivery parameters. Secondly, a Blue Ribbon Committee comprised of members from the community and government should be created. The Blue Ribbon Committee should assess what the fundamental services delivered by the police department should be and identify funding sources.

The next objective is to establish a communication's center ad hoc committee that would assess the call priority system. The ad hoc committee would develop a call response protocol for deployment of resources and recommend the "type" of resource (public service or private enterprise) best suited to provide the service. Hypothetically, in-progress events involving a threat to life or property would receive an immediate police officer response. Those events that were not emergencies would be managed by civilian services provided by the government entity or private enterprise, or by self-reporting.

Creating a law enforcement call response team comprised of tenured peace officers and members from the agency's telephonic report unit is the next objective. This team would telephonically triage the call and route the request for service to the appropriate agency for service delivery.

Privatization of government services offers many opportunities. Such as the contracting of police services for special interests needs, paid by that special interest group, thereby minimizing the impact to the agency's budget without impacting the level of police service provided. In the alternative, law enforcement agencies could encourage the community to contract with private security firms and allow these organizations to assume some traditional police roles, such as providing policing services at special events or conducting routine patrols of neighborhoods. The contracting of services would be left to the parties of the agreement. The municipality continues to be a direct benefactor of the business relationship regardless because of the revenue stream created through taxation and licensing fees without the increases in expenditures.

Another benefit of privatization is the shift from the community's dependency upon government services to the marketplace for those same services. The public will become more resourceful and a smarter consumer as a result. Finally, with the decreases in calls for non-essential services, officers will have more time to interdict in criminal behaviors (Savelli, Gregory, November 2001).

The strategy to employ to manage calls for service is the employment of civilian personnel to assist sworn personnel in service delivery. Civilian personnel have been fulfilling traditional police roles for many years in such fields as evidence collection, minor accident investigation, and parking enforcement. The objective is to expand the traditional role that civilians have played in agencies based on an assessment of what assignments an officer should fill versus a civilian. For example, civilians could fill many management positions in assignments such as police records, property and evidence facilities, background investigations, internal affairs investigations and training unit functions. In addition, civilian personnel could conduct cold case follow-up investigations in misdemeanor and felony cases.

Expanding the civilian force within the agency has several benefits. It would cost less than increasing the force with the same numbers of sworn personnel and would release sworn personnel from support functions and return them to policing functions.

The final objective to the strategic plan is a taxation protocol for existing tax revenue sharing processes that ensures dedicated funding for law enforcement personnel, programs and projects.

The success of the strategic plan will depend upon the transition from the status quo to a desired state. Transition management is crucial to the process. It should address

issues ranging from the readiness of the leader to reinforcing and institutionalizing the new methodologies for responding to calls for service.

Several questions should be asked before implementing any changes. First, is there a need for change? Secondly, are conditions right for change to begin? Finally, can the future be separated from the past? If the answers to all three questions are in the affirmative, then the transition to the new course of action should begin.

The window of opportunity for implementing changes to manage calls for service is closing, once again! As the state's budget recovers, as it did in the early 1990s, monies will become available for law enforcement staffing. As the agency's employ personnel, there will be no sense of urgency to address calls for service. Finally, with time, memories begin to fade. The community and the police profession will forget about the delayed responses to requests for services and acclimate to the conditions at the time. Eventually, officers will be working harder, and will not be a bit smarter. Unfortunately, budget crises are cyclical, and the profession will be faced with the same issues in the future.

Therefore, calls for service management is a critical assessment that must occur immediately if the law enforcement profession is going to change the community's perceptions of the role for law enforcement. Historically, the logical response to increased demands for service was to increase staffing. However, fiscal times being what they are for the state of California, that option is no longer viable. Eliminating non-essential programs without alternative service plans, delaying responses or not responding at all to requests for service is not an attractive alternative either.

So the question “how will personnel shortages impact law enforcement’s response to calls for service in a mid-sized agency by 2008?” should begin the quest for the development of solutions that would be non-traditional and innovative. If nothing is done to address the personnel shortages in law enforcement, the impact to the calls for service will be:

- More calls for service than the number of officers available to handle the workload during any given shift.
- Increases in the amount of time that a call for service will wait for the dispatch of police services.
- Increases in criminal activity due to a decreased fear of apprehension.
- Community dissatisfaction with the department’s calls for service response times.
- Perceptions that the department is unable to stop criminal activity.
- A negative effect on the community’s sense of security and safety.
- Political or private intervention at all levels of the department that may be contrary to the best interests of the department, its members and the community.
- Low morale of the employees; there may even be increases in stress claims due to the never-ending backlog of calls for service.
- High numbers of voluntary terminations by line-level employees. They will leave the department to seek opportunities at agencies where there is discretionary work-time for proactive law enforcement activity.

To mitigate the problems that are projected because of the impact that personnel shortages will have on law enforcement's response to calls for service, the law enforcement agency should implement a Law Enforcement Call Response Team. This team would telephonically triage and respond to requests for service. In addition, the agency and its communication center should collaborate on a call priority system that ensures the appropriate personnel and resources are deployed for the service requested. Finally, the agency, its communications center and an ad hoc committee comprised of community members should assess the types of calls law enforcement should provide a service for and consider the privatization of other public services. Doing so shifts the burden for providing certain non-emergency services from the public sector to the private without depriving the public of that service.

Fortunately, as a result of the adoption of the community oriented policing philosophy by many jurisdictions, the profession already understands that the community's policing services must be tailored to the needs of the community, by the community, with consideration as to what the community's resources can support. Nevertheless, there is a greater need than ever to assess community service and the role that law enforcement must take as a provider. Other service providers must be identified. In addition, the give and take between service providers must be dynamic, ever-changing and adaptable to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats posed by the internal and external environments of the agency and the community.

There are budget implications, such as the time commitment to nurture the collaborations, prepare and present information, and to obtain feedback from the community. There are costs for employment and training of personnel to create the Call

Response Team and to expand the civilian workforce to respond to non-emergency or low priority calls for service. The development of a budget will be paramount to the funding of the strategic and transition management plans. However, this may be a pay-as-you-go process.

Rethinking traditional methods of conducting business by being creative in how service delivery processes could be changed to address the impact personnel shortages will hold for law enforcement's response to calls for service will require collaborations, concessions, and fiscal planning and management.

In conclusion, as the jurisdiction's population increases, so will the calls for service. Unfortunately, fiscal constraints prevent many jurisdictions from hiring additional officers to meet the increasing demands for service. The department's personnel must rethink the traditional methods for handling calls for service. This article provides viable suggestions to resolve the impact that personnel shortages will have on calls for service. Nevertheless, success in the future on this issue requires action today.

REFERENCE LIST

- Carlson, Ken. (April 17, 2003) Job Growth Surges with Region's Population Valley Counties among Growth Leaders due to Internal Migration: Modesto Bee, , sec. A, p. 1
- Delbecq, Andrew L., and Van de Ven, Andrew H. A (1971) Group Process Model for Identification and Program Planning, Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences, pp. 466-492
- Delbecq, Andrew L., Van de Ven, Andrew H., Gustafson, David H. and Foreman, Scott (1975). Group Techniques for Program Planning, a Guide to Nominal Group Technique and Delphi Processes, Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences, pp. None provided
- Exter, Thomas and Joe Schwartz. (Nov 1990) Crime Stoppers; a relationship of populations growth and crime rate. American Demographics, v12 n11 pp. 24-25
- Finnerty, Kevin C. (January 2000) Expenditures for Modesto Police department; a review of the Budget. Unpublished master's dissertation, California State University at Stanislaus, Turlock.
- Galles, Gary M. and Robert L. Sexton. (Jan 2000) Computing the Extent of Circumvention of Proposition 13: A Response. The American Journal of Economics and Sociology, v59 i1 p133
- Gallop, George Jr. (No. 396) The Gallop Poll Monthly., p34
- Gallop, George Jr. (September 2000) The Gallop Poll Monthly. No. 450
- Harris Interactive, Inc. (Apr. 19, 2002) The Harris Poll, no page number
- McQueen, Iris. (Nov 1990) Taxpayer Revolts; American City & County, v105 n11 pp. 22-23
- National Opinion Research Center, General Social Surveys, 1972-2000, Storrs: CT
- Research Center for the People & The Press, (Mar. 21, 2001) NEWSRelease Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office
- Sample, John A. (March 1984) Nominal Group Technique: An Alternative to Brainstorming, Journal of Extension, Volume 22, Number 2
- Savelli, Gregory. (November 2001) How Will Fee Based Services Impact Patrol Operations of a Mid-Size Police department by the Year 2006? Unpublished Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training Command College dissertation, Sacramento.

Stephens, Gene. (May-June 2003) Global trends in crime: Crime varies greatly around the world, statistics show, but new tactics have proved effective in the United States. The Futurist, v37 i3 pp. 40-47

The Gallup Organization, Inc., (June 25, 2001) The Gallup Poll online services at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr010625.asp>.

Vila, B. (1999). The Role of Police in American Society: A Documentary History.. Place Westport, CT: Greenwood Press

Witkin, Gordon, Monica Guttman, and Tracey Lenzy. (June 17, 1996). This is 9-1-1 ... Please Hold; U.S. World Report, v120 n24 pp. 30-37

Endnotes

¹ Data compiled by Modesto Police Department Crime Analysis Unit staff and used in the presentation titled “Report to City Council Public Safety Ad Hoc Committee on Police & Fire” by Chief Roy Wasden.