

An Operational Staffing Model for the Houston Police Department

**The Police Executive Research Forum
Washington DC
And
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Huntsville TX**

Study Focus: Operational Units

- Units that provide direct services to the people of Houston
- Field Operations:
 - Units assigned to Houston's 13 geographically-based Patrol Divisions
 - Units assigned to the Traffic Enforcement Division
- Strategic Operations:
 - Units assigned to the Airport Division, which provides services for the George Bush Intercontinental Airport and the William P. Hobby Airport
 - Units assigned to the Special Operations Division, which provides patrol operations for the Central Business District and Downtown
- Investigative Operations:
 - Units assigned to Criminal Investigations Command
 - Units assigned to Special Investigations Command

Reactive, Proactive and Regulatory Policing Work

- Units providing **reactive** services exist primarily to respond to demands and expectations from the public for service, either by requesting police service directly (such as making a 911 call) or by reporting crimes.
- **Proactive** units are generally created to seek out and address specific problems that result in crime, or other issues that have an impact on public safety.
 - Narcotics
 - Repeat or violent offenders
 - Reduce motor vehicle crashes and improve the flow of traffic
- **Regulatory** units exist to provide oversight for businesses licensed by the city that may, without monitoring and inspection, become involved in criminal enterprise.
 - Legal gaming establishments,
 - Sexually oriented businesses,
 - Liquor sellers, and
 - Automotive dealers and recyclers.

Measuring Police Workload and Results

Determining the appropriate numbers of officers needed for each of the types of functions – reactive, proactive and regulatory – depends on developing measures of the workload that needs to be addressed. The complexity of the workload measurement process varies by the function type.

Measuring Reactive Work

- Data needed to examine reactive patrol staffing is routinely recorded through a department's computer aided dispatch (CAD) system
 - Average amount of time it takes for officers to arrive at the scene of a call (response time)
 - Amount of officer time consumed by calls for service
 - Amount of officer time consumed by officer-initiated proactive activity
- Reactive investigation workload
 - Routine reports of crime
 - Classification of crimes by type
 - Detective worksheets to determine the total time needed to conduct reactive investigations,

Measuring Proactive Work

- The work of proactive units is more difficult to assess.
- Traffic operations count the number of citations issued or the number of drunk/impaired drivers arrested.
 - Reductions in the number of fatal crashes as a result of enforcement efforts targeted at high-risk locations for crashes
 - Traffic congestion decreased
- Gang Unit
 - Reductions in gang-related shootings
 - Reductions in the numbers of gangs and gang members
 - Overall reductions in gang crime, both violent and non-violent
- Measures of Task Force value
 - Arrests of offenders who live in the city's jurisdiction,
 - Crimes committed in the city that are cleared by those arrests,
 - Number of organized crime enterprises with major operations in the city that have been eliminated.

Proactive Policing

- Proactive police units usually report the number of activities they complete – reports written, cases reviewed, arrests made, drugs/assets seized, etc.
- Little emphasis on the outcome therefore number of officers assigned is primarily a management preference based on historical staffing.

Measuring Regulatory Work

- Police regulatory functions are frequently measured by
 - The number of inspections made
 - The number of violations discovered
 - The number of neighborhood complaints addressed.
- Measures that should assist in determining the success of regulatory units include
 - The ability to respond promptly to neighborhood complaints
 - The ability to conduct proactive investigations that result in the discovery and prosecution of criminals tied to license violations
 - The volume of inspections that are violation-free.
- Inspections are a deterrent. They should be conducted often enough (and the penalty for violations should be severe enough) that licensees have sufficient incentive to avoid crime.

How the Study Was Completed

- This review of operational staffing in the Houston Police Department was conducted by PERF and JUSTEX Systems.
- JUSTEX Systems took responsibility for assessing *reactive* functions, including the operational staffing needs for all of the units assigned to Houston's 13 geographically-based Patrol Divisions within Field Operations, as well as the reactive units within Investigative Operation's Criminal Investigations Command.
 - JUSTEX Systems used its Allocation Model for Patrol (AMP) and Allocation Model for Investigations (AMI) to project staffing needs
- The PERF portion of the study focused primarily on assessing the *proactive* and *regulatory* operations of the department, including
 - Units within the Traffic Enforcement Division
 - Units within the Special Investigation Command of Investigative Operations
 - Units assigned to the Airport and Special Operations divisions

Policy Preferences

- Interviews were conducted to identify the preferences for policies to guide the operations of the Houston Police Department.
- Project staff interviewed:
 - HPD command staff
 - City council members
 - Additional HPD personnel, including the supervisors in charge of each of the divisions and units, along with a number of the rank and file officers

Policy Preferences

- **High level of police visibility and frequent presence of officers and patrol cars in the city.**
- **Preference inside the department to have more patrol officers available in two-officer cars.**
- **Improve the department's investigative capacity.**
- **Increase community policing efforts and encourage greater community participation in crime prevention and problem-solving efforts.**
- **Encourage more positive police involvement with youth.**
- **Re-examining the benefits of the Patrol Command's storefronts.**
- **Decentralize policing.**
- **At least maintain current level of staffing; hire to keep pace with attrition.**
- **Respond adequately to community complaints about disorder, noise, and excess traffic.**
- **Ensure criminal and regulatory enforcement of vice offenses.**
- **Patrol officers need to be engaged with the community.**
- **Commit resources to combat organized crime and gangs.**
- **Increased emphasis on traffic crash reduction.**

Reactive Policing

- Patrol and Criminal Investigations
- JUSTEX

Proactive and Regulatory Policing

- Inter-Agency Task Forces
- Traffic
 - Traffic Enforcement Division
 - Vehicular Crimes Division
- Regulatory Functions
 - Vice Division
 - Auto Dealers Unit
- Other Units

Inter-Agency Tasks Forces

- The Houston Police Department has assigned 187 sworn positions and eight civilian positions to 13 interagency task forces. 13 Tasks Forces such as
 - The Multi-Agency Gangs Task Force,
 - The HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) Task Force,
 - The Houston Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF),
 - The Houston Violent Crime Task Force.
- No systematic assessment of the value of the work of the officers assigned to the task forces.
- Contribution of the HPD officers cannot be separated from the actions of the entire task force.

Each task force should furnish specific data to measure the outcomes of its operations related to its core mission and its impact on crime in the City of Houston

Traffic

- 200 employees assigned to the Traffic Enforcement Division; 121 to the Vehicular Crimes Division
- **Reorganize the HPD traffic function.**
- **Focus primarily on crash reduction and traffic flow improvement.**
- The Traffic Enforcement Division and the Vehicular Crimes Division should be combined into a single Crash Reduction Division (CRD)
- Create a single new Crash Reduction and Congestion Abatement Unit (CRCAU)
 - CRCAU for each Area Command
 - Each CRCAU: one lieutenant, one traffic crash analyst, and four street squads – each squad with one sergeant, six officers and two motorcycle officers

Traffic

- **Heavy focus on the analysis component, to determine specific crash reduction strategies for modifying specific driver behavior at frequent crash locations/corridors.**
- **Primary measure of effectiveness; decline in crashes.**
- **Houston Police Department's new division should take the lead in bringing all involved agencies together to create an area-wide traffic mitigation and crash reduction strategy.**

Regulatory Functions

- HPD regulatory activities focus on automotive dealers and parts suppliers, sexually oriented businesses (SOBs), gambling, and alcoholic beverages.
- **There is substantial benefit to HPD's practice of proactively using regulatory power to identify and investigate crimes that are associated with these otherwise legal activities.**

Regulatory Functions

- Number of officers assigned to vice operations is a policy decision that can be informed by three criteria:
 - Can neighborhood complaints be dealt with promptly?
 - Can proactive investigations be conducted while continuing routine inspections?
 - Do most inspections show that the business is operating legitimately?
- **The Vice Division should establish additional measures to help capture the effectiveness of its investigations, specifically regarding quality-of-life complaints involving noise and traffic complaints during evening and nighttime hours.**

Other Units

- Airport Division
- Special Operations Division
- Auto Theft Division
- Gang Division
- Major Offenders Division
- Narcotics Division

Airport Division

- **The Airport Division should follow recent TSA recommendations requesting an increased presence at airport security checkpoints and ticket counters during peak travel times.**
- Based on current staffing strategies a total of 24 officers are needed immediately.
- An additional four officers will be needed for the future Hobby Airport international terminal.

Special Operations Division

- Special Events Unit: The unit (four officers) supports all special events within the city. Events include: parades, “fun runs,” street functions/festivals, dignitary visits, and all other major events for the police department and the city.
- **This planning function does not require sworn personnel. Consideration should be given to staffing this function with civilians.**

Auto Theft Division

- 24 of the 40 officers are assigned to proactive investigations.
- The appropriate number of proactive division investigators becomes a matter of division priorities and department philosophy.
- Although the number of auto thefts and related division cases in the city has declined over the years, an aggressive proactive enforcement effort should be maintained to ensure auto theft trends are quickly identified and adequately addressed.
- **Maintain the current number of proactive investigators.**

Gang Division

- This unit is multi-layered with coordination between the Gang Division and gang-related work by officers in the patrol divisions.
- Multi Agency Gang Task Force
- The productivity of the Crime Reduction Unit, which is tasked with focusing on gang hot spot areas and repeat gang offenders, justifies its staffing of a lieutenant, six sergeants and 67 officers.
- In 2013, the number of suspects jailed averaged 43 per officer. Officers work in teams to ensure officer and community safety.

Major Offenders Division

- The Major Offenders Division is comprised of three major groupings: Special Thefts, Targeted Offenders and Inter-Agency Task Forces. Special Thefts is made up of the Environmental Investigations Unit, the Police Impersonation Squad, the Swindle Squad, the Cargo Theft Squad and the Livestock/Animal Cruelty Squad.
- The squads that make up Special Thefts have diverse missions.
- They average about 163 cases per officer per year, or a little over three per officer per week.
- They generated nearly \$6.5 million in recovered property and environmental citations.
- The total volume of these cases, and the dollar value of recovered property and environmental citations, justifies the five sergeants, 16 officers and six civilians assigned to the Special Thefts group.

Narcotics Division

- The Narcotics Division, composed of a total of 209 positions, is the primary component of the HPD tasked with investigating and disrupting drug trafficking organizations.
- Workload is predominantly self-initiated in nature. Those portions of the division – the HIDTA Task Forces – are described in the section of the report on “Inter-Agency Task Forces.”
- The remaining elements of the division are two sections with eight dedicated squads to address general narcotics enforcement within the city.
- **Based on the city’s violent and property crime, current staffing levels of the General Enforcement squads should be maintained.** These officers are the primary component, operating strictly within the city, to address citizen-initiated complaints.

Civilianization

- Police officers are performing civilian duties because the work is critical to division operations, and the department lacks the necessary civilian staffing to perform those tasks.
- Specific areas that should be reviewed for civilianization include the Auto Theft Detail, the Narcotics Division's Administration Unit, the Vice Division's Administration Unit, and the Bicycle Administration and Training Unit.
- The HPD should utilize the department's Planning component to review all division sworn administrative positions with the division captain and develop a civilianization plan for future budget discussions. Prior to requesting additional officers for necessary patrol and investigative functions, the department should first identify those administrative positions staffed by sworn officers that could be civilianized with better-trained or lower-cost civilian staff.