

LEOPRD Conference - 25 April 2007 – Chicago

On April 25, PERF held the 2007 Law Enforcement Planning and Research Directors' Forum in Chicago with the goal of facilitating and exchanging information between data experts and operations directors. The conference focused on innovative, evidence-based policing techniques from departments around the country, as well as the sharing of best practices and ways to increase departmental focus on planning and research. Presentations at the LEPRD Forum covered a wide array of topics, including patrol division re-districting, community surveying, offender re-entry, and promising practices in innovative policing.

Patrol Division Re-Districting

The first presentation of the forum, "Patrol Division Re-Districting", was given by Paul Paskoff of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD), and focused on their attempt to reconfigure patrol areas in order to connect neighborhoods without increasing the workload or straining resources. Population growth, workload imbalance, and division office capacity were all important issues when determining the need to re-district, a process that required careful consideration to possible changes in service time and natural barriers, both physical and socially-influenced. Once these issues were considered, the department had to deal with the challenges presented by close proximity of district offices and the difficulty of establishing a strong presence in outlying areas. The final plan, a re-designed map containing thirteen districts instead of the original twelve, required new budgeting and funding for the new office and the re-distribution of personnel and resources to the new service areas. It also contained a plan for future re-districting to accommodate the estimated population growth and the light rail system.

The CMPD has had success with the new patrol divisions, and it has resulted in an increase in visibility and police presence, as well as more problem-solving time for the officers. In the time following the implementation of the thirteen district design, there has been a decrease in robberies and an increase in drug arrests and illegal gun seizures. Additionally, the new plan has balanced the department workload, improved response time to outlying areas, and accounted for future growth in the area.

Community/Business Surveys

Mora Fiedler of the Denver Police Department discussed the importance and value of surveys and their role in identifying new or emerging problems. Surveys can be valuable informational tools, especially in areas where underreporting is a problem, and their use can help improve community relations with the police. Additionally, follow-up surveys can be used as a measurement of change and accountability, especially when focusing on the issues that are important to citizens.

Of the three main survey styles (phone, mail-in, and door-to-door), door-to-door surveys offer the most flexibility and personal contact with the community, but they are also the most time-consuming. There are ways, however, to do door-to-door surveys on a budget while maintaining a good response rate. Establishing an official presence is important in door-to-door surveys, and in a Denver survey, officers in uniform reported a response rate three times higher than the response rate for civilian volunteers. Sending police cadets or explorers into the community to survey residents is one way to do this without using a large contingent of officers. Additionally, using students or trained volunteers to assist with data entry and word processing can help contain administrative costs while increasing community interaction with the police department.

Offender Re-Entry

The topic of re-entry was covered by Director Jennifer Maconochie and Assistant Director Hemali Gunaratne of the Boston Police Department's (BPD) Office of Strategic Planning & Research, who discussed a P&R case study on the subject. After identifying several areas that had experienced an increase in violence, often committed by offenders who had recently been released from prison, the BPD began a study of post-release offending and developed strategies to reduce the problem. In order to focus on reducing violent crimes by high-risk offenders, the BPD considered the following issues: the number of monthly releases who were also in gang databases, recidivism risk factors, and gaps in service or post-release supervision.

Based on this information, the BPD developed a comprehensive strategy to assist high risk offenders and maintain their participation in the program, the Boston Reentry Initiative. Both community and law enforcement involvement were an integral part of the process, as they ensured fairness in the selection process while maintaining a high level of supervision. Partnership development between law enforcement, court services, and social services assisted in the case management process and ensured the flow of high quality information between all parties. Additionally, this program included faith-based mentors, many of whom were former offenders, health services, and job development in order to facilitate a successful re-entry process. Monthly evaluations of offenders in the program showed a correlation between participation and a change in their release profile, and 66% of participants have remained either arrest-free or have an arrest on a minor, non-serious charge. Of those who do recidivate, less than one-fifth committed a serious or violent crime. The success of the program is illustrated by its recognition as a national model by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Brookings Institute, among others.

A Chief's Perspective

Chief Ken Miller of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) presented "A Chief's Perspective", detailing planning and organization strategies within the CMPD. Additionally, he discussed the implementation of these strategies and their outcomes in a local violence reduction project. The focus of the presentation was creating planning units that make sense within the context of the police mission and that make efficient use of limited resources. When developing crime reduction strategies, it is important that department analysts fully understand the research design and consider the potential effects of outside variables, the possibility of crime displacement, and the costs and benefits of the project. A thorough and continuing assessment of a program makes it possible to determine the most appropriate and strategy for a particular agency's crime reduction or public safety goal.

Promising Practices

In a presentation entitled "Promising Practices", Jennifer Maconochie discussed the effectiveness of policing innovations and the challenges that they present both within departments as a whole and for Planning and Research departments specifically. Evidence regarding the effectiveness of the eight major policing innovations (community policing, broken windows policing, problem-oriented policing, pulling levers policing, third party policing, hot spots policing, Compstat, and evidence-based policing) is limited, and because many departments use a combination of these practices, it is difficult to determine how successful these programs are individually.

The wide variety of policing strategies presents challenges for entire departments, and many of these difficulties overlap. Leadership changes within an organization, high-profile incidents, and sudden changes in crime statistics may force a department to reevaluate their

approach to crime prevention, which can be difficult to do once a program has been firmly established within an agency. Additionally, it is necessary to gain support throughout the department as well as from the public, requiring a balancing of interests and the creation of a plan suitable for all parties. This is especially true with regard to homeland security issues, which can drain resources from traditional policing programs while impact, often negatively, police relationships with the community.

Program implementation and evaluation creates additional challenges for Planning and Research departments that reflect the difficulty of balancing and maintaining projects. Planning and Research directors have to maintain the long-term focus of programs while finding a balance between timeliness, accuracy, and consistency. This can be especially difficult when departments are trying to catch up on old or delayed projects. In addition, P&R professionals have to create appropriate performance measures and evaluation methods for programs, and their success often depends on taking a proactive approach to the issues that they face.

Results

The idea behind this conference was to organize and facilitate communication between Planning and Research Directors around the country, not only during the conference, but throughout the year. PERF is working to organize committees on various issues related to the P&R field and get directors from across the country involved in the project. New committees include creating a listserv, networking and planning for next year's conference, training, funding and sponsorships, and creating a resource page for P& R professionals.