

Overcoming the Challenges of Managing and Expanding a Patrol Division

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the intricacies and challenges faced in managing, expanding, modernizing, and improving a patrol division as well as the research and implementation processes that proved successful at the Bella Vista Police Department. I promoted to the position of Patrol Lieutenant four years ago. Stepping into a new position with little guidance can be stressful, frustrating, and overwhelming. Trying to navigate the duties of the position that were already established while also building the other programs with an already established budget and set number of personnel caused an overextension of time and resources. The expansion included the development of a fifteen member Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team, a part time division of three officers, both bicycle and motorcycle units, a more formal training program, and special events. I identified a need to improve the department's Field Training Officer (FTO) program to standardize the training of patrol officers. Having only twenty-six officers in patrol, I will explain several ways to present staffing issues to Chiefs and City Councils. I hope my experiences and success in expanding the Bella Vista Police Department's Patrol Division will provide some new ideas and ways for future leaders to manage and expand a Patrol Division.

### The Challenges of Managing and Expanding a Patrol Division

It is vital that a police department is continually striving to improve for the citizens they serve, but also for their employees. When a department is allowed to continue with the same staffing, expectations, equipment, and leadership mentality it leads to complacency. Department leaders must advocate for modernization and expansion. For this to work, someone within the department has to take control and do the necessary research, put in the necessary time, and be willing to look outside of their own department for ideas and guidance. Beary (2018) discusses the need for a department to evolve, but acknowledges that “adopting techniques that keep pace with an onslaught of new and updated policies can be a challenge.” Knowing some of the challenges a department will face when trying to expand, the resources available, and questions associated with tackling such a major task will make the process smoother and less taxing.

The first challenge is knowing where to start. Before being able to expand, you have to ensure your current staffing needs are met. There has been a shift in recent years in the number of applicants for the position of police officer. Public scrutiny of officers, protests, and the COVID-19 pandemic has played a large role in the downward trend of people interested in a career in law enforcement. Mellen (2011) explores this trend and summarizes it best by saying, “In the wake of a spasmodic year of protests and pandemic, plus an aftermath of violent crime, the profession may be fast approaching a generational and possibly historic reckoning.”

Competing with the private sector has become an increasing problem. In 2021, the Bella Vista Police Department began the year with a total number of officers assigned to patrol of twenty-four due to having two unfilled positions. The number of those unfilled positions rose to four throughout the year due to officers resigning to pursue careers in the private sector. Like

other departments, ours was hit hard by COVID-19 in 2021. Working at all time low staffing levels due to the number of officers in quarantine, we experienced the loss of one of our own police officers in October from the virus. This was a difficult time for the Patrol Division, but since crime did not decrease, it caused an overextension of officers both physically and emotionally. This caused some members to re-evaluate their career choice. It is hard to fault people for wanting to get paid more money at a job where they don't risk their lives every single day. Finding ways to make your department appealing to those who are interested in a career in law enforcement is important.

As a patrol supervisor, it is important to remember the things you enjoyed doing when you were working the streets. To find ways to not only bring new officers in, but to keep them with your department. As a relatively small department with low retention, promotional opportunities were rare. The supervisor positions in patrol, one (1) Lieutenant, three (3) Sergeants, and three (3) Corporals, are historically filled by individuals until they retire. Four years ago there were no other opportunities, special teams, or programs. With a new Police Chief hired from a larger, more progressive agency supporting the growth, the decision was made to create more options for officers in patrol. The vision became to add a SWAT Team, Motor Unit, Bike Patrol, Honor Guard, Community Outreach Program, and add more FTO positions.

Another idea to make the Bella Vista Police Department more attractive was to institute ten hour shifts with set days based off of seniority. By switching to ten hour shifts, officers receive three days off instead of the two they had with eight hour shifts, encouraging more time with family. This shows the officers that the department is family focused. Orrick (2007) explains that "when employees' personal values are similar to those represented by the police

department the individual is more likely to identify with the agency's purpose and be anchored to that organization.”

Ten hour shifts are not only better from a recruitment standpoint, but it also alleviates overtime for report writing, encourages physical fitness by allowing members to work out on duty, and gives time for other training to be done during the overlap in shifts instead of during their off-duty time. With only twenty-six sworn officers in the patrol division, I began the process by creating sample schedules with our staffing levels to present to the Captain and Chief of our department. Data was compiled from our reporting software to determine the busiest times. These peak call volume times were used in determining the “power shifts” (overlap times when two shifts were working together). Our department operates with a minimum of three patrol officers, supervisors being included in that number, on duty at any given time. With three shifts, referred to as day shift, evening shift, and midnight shift, it takes a minimum of nine officers to run patrol each day. Expect obstacles and set-backs. Sick leave, family medical leave, and vacation leave is an unavoidable factor. It is important to expect that staffing will always be fluid, but there are formulas and guidelines that can be used for proposing more positions.

While staffing allocation for law enforcement agencies is not an exact science, there are analytically based formulas that can be used in determining how many officers a department needs. Wilson (2013) presents five different approaches to staffing and encourages utilizing a method “that specifically considers workload, performance objectives, and work schedules.” The International Association of Chief of Police (IACP) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) both have staffing formulas departments can use as a guide in determining the necessary number of officers for their department. Figuring the data and presenting it to city leaders can

help build a case for why a particular police department may need additional positions.

Remember, it is imperative that you have someone willing to put in the work.

The first step of presenting a strong case to increase staffing is gathering the necessary data. The following information from the Bella Vista Police Department was compiled to plead the case of increasing the number of officers in patrol. Like most departments, the Bella Vista Police Department sees a steady increase in calls for service and certain types of crimes. Some of the crimes fluctuate from year to year, but calls for service stay on the rise. It is important to note that due to COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines, small changes were made in the way the department processed certain call types in 2020; therefore, 2019 and 2021 data was used for this presentation. The department saw a growth from twenty-one thousand, two hundred and fifty-two (21,252) to twenty-one thousand, eight hundred and sixty (21,860) calls for service from 2019 to 2021. These calls for service include traffic complaints, theft reports, domestic disturbances, alarms, accidents, warrant services, and all our criminal arrests made during the year. The department averaged a staffing level of twenty-two (22) to twenty-four (24) Patrol Officers distributed across the three shifts. The Patrol Lieutenant and Training Coordinator are included in the count in the patrol staffing number; however these two positions do not handle calls for service and provide supervision and training to the department only. So, with those positions excluded, the average officer handled nine hundred and ninety-four (994) calls per year (21,860/22). Considering an officer is scheduled to work two hundred and eight (208) days per year, not including vacation and sick days, there is a heavy load that is placed on each individual officer. The time spent on scene by officers averaged out in our reporting system to approximately forty-five (45) minutes per call. This shows how little time our Patrol Officers

have for proactivity such as traffic enforcement and crime prevention. Using the data collected, the calculations can be made for the presentation.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (n.d.) encourages departments to conduct workload assessments for “valuable data-based insight into how their existing resources are being utilized and whether they can be redeployed to reach agency goals for officer availability or if additional officers are needed.” The IACP provides a guide to understand how an officer’s time on duty is spent. According to this, thirty percent (30%) of that time is “Administrative Time.” In this time, an officer is completing paperwork, servicing police vehicles, personal relief, eating, and other administrative tasks. Another thirty percent (30%) of an officer’s time is spent on “Operational Labor.” In this time, officers are answering calls for service. The next thirty percent (30%) is time an officer uses to be proactive, referred to as “Uncommitted Time.” This formula allows for “Flex Time” of ten percent (10%) to be used towards any tasks.

Using the information provided, I conducted research to determine if any other police departments were successful in utilizing the information from the IACP to propose a need for additional officers. Cooke (2015) conducted an assessment of manpower for the Dalton, GA Police Department. Utilizing their assessment as a guide, I personalized the steps to better fit the Bella Vista Police Department. The following are the steps I took to begin analyzing the data:

**Step 1:** Determine the number of complaints or incidents received and responded to in a year by the Bella Vista Police Department (21,860 calls for service). This information was extracted from the reporting software utilized by our department.

**Step 2:** I then multiplied the total number of incidents by 0.75, because forty-five minutes is three quarters of an hour. This was done to find the total average number of hours spent on scene of an incident. By this calculation, approximately sixteen thousand, three hundred and ninety-five hours were spent on the scene of incidents, or as the IACP refers to it, “Operational Labor” ( $21,860 \times .75 = 16,395$ ).

**Step 3:** Next, I took the number of hours and multiplied it by three, since IACP states that “Operational Labor” only accounts for one third of an officer’s time. The result is forty nine thousand, one hundred and eighty five hours ( $16,395 \times 3 = 49,185$ ). Then, the ten percent (10%) “Flex Time” must be added. To find this, divide the thirty percent (30%) by three to come up with ten percent (10%) ( $16,395/3 = 5,465$ ) and add it to the other ninety percent (90%) ( $49,185 + 5,465 = 54,650$ ). This is the total number of hours needed to complete calls for service as well as other duties of a patrol officer using the call volume from 2021.

**Step 4:** The Bella Vista Police Department runs ten hour shifts, three hundred and sixty five (365) days a year. Therefore, one officer position totals three thousand six hundred and fifty hours ( $10 \text{ hours} \times 365 \text{ days} = 3,650 \text{ hours}$ ). To find the number of officers needed to serve, take the number of hours needed to complete calls for service and other duties of a patrol officer and divide that number by the number of hours one patrol officer position serves ( $54,650 \text{ divided by } 3650 = 14.97$ ). According to the application of the IACP formula, it takes 15 patrol officers to handle the estimated 21,860 incidents.

**Step 5:** Since officers do not work every day of the year without time off, it is necessary to determine the amount of time an officer is actually on duty. This will allow a



determination of the number of officers that are required to staff the patrol division. A review of the department's benefits, including regular days off, holidays, bereavement, and personal time off (PTO), for patrol-related duties 52% of the established figure of 3650 hours. If we multiple 3650 hours (total amount of hours needed to staff one basic, one officer patrol unit, for one year) by 52%, we come up with an average of (1898 hours) in which an officer is off duty during this specific time frame. Since there are 3650 hours necessary to staff one basic officer, this gives an available duty time of 1752 hours. We completed 4761.75 hours of training between 36 sworn positions. On average, our patrol Officers did 132 training hours per officer. This is subtracted from the 1752 available hours, (1620) Therefore, to determine how many officers are necessary to staff one patrol element, divide 3650 hours needed for one year, by the number of hours available ( $3650 / 1620 = 2.25$ ). This means that (2.25) officers are required to fill each patrol element. By multiplying the availability factor (2.25) by the number of patrol elements, you have the number of patrol officers needed ( $2.25 \times 13.47 = 33.75$ ).

According to the IACP formula, the Bella Vista Police Department Patrol Division should be at staffing level of thirty-four (34) Patrol Officers to handle the twenty one thousand, eight hundred and sixty (21,860) calls for service. The current allotted staffing for the patrol division is twenty-size (26), eight (8) officers below the recommended number of officers needed according to the IACP "General Principal for Distribution of Time" model.

In 2017, the FBI conducted research on the average number of officers for departments based on region and population (FBI 2017). Using this FBI chart, recommended staffing for police departments in our region is 1.7 officers per one thousand (1,000) citizens. The most

recent census shows the population of Bella Vista, AR to be thirty thousand, one hundred and four (30,104). According to this calculation, the FBI recommendation for the total number of sworn police officers in the city of Bella Vista is fifty-two (52) ( $1.7 \times (30,104/1,000) = 51.1768$ ). The Bella Vista Police Department's current sworn staffing number is thirty-six (36). This includes one three (3) sworn administrative staff members, (1 Chief, 1 Captain, and 1 Lieutenant), seven (7) sworn members in the Criminal Investigation Division (1 Lieutenant, 1 Sergeant, 4 Detectives, and 1 Evidence Technician), and twenty-six (26) sworn members assigned to the Patrol Division (1 Lieutenant, 3 Sergeants, 3 Corporals, 1 Corporal of Training, and 18 officers).

Once staffing levels are increased to make current responsibilities manageable, it is important to evaluate the Field Training Officer (FTO) program to ensure the new patrol officers receive adequate, consistent, and thorough training. Four years ago, our department still utilized hand-written forms in order to "sign off" an officer. There was no formal way to track progression or identify problems from either the Probationary Officer or the Field Training Officers. I knew that there had to be a better way, so I reached out to surrounding agencies and inquired about their FTO programs.

In my research, I learned of a training program called Agency 360 that was being used by the Rogers Police Department. I met with the Lieutenant over Training at the Rogers Police Department. He provided me with his department's policies and procedures pertaining to their FTO program and walked me through the Agency 360 program. After meeting with him, I reached out to Agency 360 to talk pricing and implementation. With the Chief's approval, I was able to purchase the software. This program modernized, organized, and stream lined the FTO process. Using some ideas from the Rogers Police Department policies and procedures, ours

were updated to help guide our Shift Supervisors and Field Training Officers. The FTO program is utilized for all new officers assigned to the Patrol Division. The decision was also made to be more selective when choosing FTOs. The position is not just about training new officers how to do the job, but also “teaches the new officer what behaviors and attitudes are accepted by the department – officially or unofficially” (Dolan 2018). Since implementation, the department has seen an increase in its Field Training Officers’ confidence and professionalism.

After the trainers are trained, strengthening the department’s training as a whole must be done. For the Bella Vista Police Department, there is not a separate division for training. In order for a training program to be successful, a department must have a dedicated, proactive training coordinator that will identify additional training to help improve the knowledge and professionalism of officers. The Bella Vista Police Department currently has one Training Coordinator who, under the supervision of the Patrol Lieutenant, manages the training program to ensure members meet the Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Training (CLEST) State and Federal training requirements. On top of the mandated training, the coordinator must also coordinate the introduction and training of officers with regard to new tools, equipment, and capabilities. For example, when the SWAT Team was established at the Bella Vista Police Department training was required for the use of less-lethal impact munitions, chemical munitions, and Noise Flash Diversionary Devices (NFDD). With a growing need for more training, certifying more instructors becomes a necessity.

For police departments in Arkansas, CLEST sets the standards for training and instructors must meet certain criteria. Identifying a need for more certified professional instructors and firearms instructors, a departments must be willing to invest time and money into certifying members from within the agency. For Bella Vista, the Patrol Supervisors are among the certified

police instructions, ensuring that the department has someone from each shift that can conduct training. Strengthening and organizing a training program and certifying a higher number of instructors before taking on more functions is imperative.

Once the training program is solid, departments will need to do a continuous evaluation of their capabilities to better serve their citizens. An evaluation of the Bella Vista Police Department Patrol Division led to goals for a better community outreach program, an Honor Guard, a bike patrol, a motor unit, a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team, and the need to maintain a training program that encouraged forward progression. As the Patrol Lieutenant, I was tasked with creating and implementing these programs as an extension of the Patrol Division that is referred to as Special Operations.

Time management and delegation of duties is essential when one person is responsible for creating and implementing multiple programs, especially when it is happening at the same time. The person primarily tasked with expanding and improving is not the only one who has added pressure. The effects are felt from the patrol officer to the chief. Most training costs money, so the Chief has to allocate the funds. In order to send an officer to the training, a supervisor must manage the schedule and find shift coverage. The officer has to put in the work to complete the course, sometimes requiring extra time away from family and personal responsibilities. Buy-in at each level is crucial for the successful implementation of new programs.

Once members at each level are on-board, the real work begins. For situations that warranted a SWAT response, neighboring agencies were called in to assist. The Bella Vista Police Department did not have a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) program four years ago.

This is not something that was accomplished overnight. As with all major changes, research and planning are required before training can even begin. Marcou (2009) explains that “It is imperative to remember that all SWAT Teams started exactly where you are right now: with no equipment and an idea that bad situations can be handled better with a particular type of specialization.” Expectations must be realistic; and know that you will make mistakes. Just as I did for the FTO program, I began with reaching out to other departments for guidance. The SWAT policy created for the Bella Vista Police Department was a combination of not only internal practices, but also items from policies and feedback from Tucson (AZ), Bentonville (AR), and Fort Collins (CO) police departments. The National Tactical Officers Associations (NTOA) and the Arkansas Tactical Officer’s Association (ATOA) are valuable resources for training and guidance for starting and maintaining a SWAT Team.

Policies and procedures are important, but a program such as SWAT requires tools and equipment that, as in our case, departments do not always have allotted for that purpose. The person leading the charge must go out and find creative ways to get these essential items before anything can happen. For the Bella Vista Police Department, utilization of a program available to law enforcement through the Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO) has been instrumental in acquiring essential equipment. Simply put, “LESO is responsible for operating the 1033 Program of LESO Program, which transfers excess military equipment to non-military law enforcement agencies” (Law Enforcement Support Office, 2021). Through this program, the Bella Vista Police Department SWAT Team has a variety of equipment ranging from armored vehicles to robotics explosive ordinances.

Allocating equipment and funding for a SWAT Team is important, but then you have to train the people to use the equipment. Soliciting members of the department with a passion for

tactical aspects of the job is vital for the success of the team. Keep in mind that these individuals will be required to put in additional hours training, be available to respond at a moment's notice, and be held to higher standards. They will be placed in higher stress situations and be expected to perform under the most extreme pressure. Selecting and managing members of the team will not always be easy. Personality conflicts, tempers, and disagreements should be expected, especially when training and working through scenarios.

Proper training and readiness is fundamental for a SWAT Team. Finding classes, ways to cover shifts to send people to training, and the funding for the classes and training can be challenging. The Arkansas Tactical Officers Association hosts a conference each year with courses members can attend. This is also a great way to network with agencies outside the department's own region. Ask other departments questions. Share your struggles, because they likely are or have experienced similar hurdles.

When the Bella Vista Police Department committed to adding a Motor Unit, it was not unlike the addition of the SWAT Team. The first step is to do research. The Benton County Sheriff's Office has a motor unit and provided us with their policies and procedures to use as a guide. They also have instructors and were willing to do a two week long class for our department to get officers certified. When a department is working with limited funding, it is important to get creative. Through the LESO program, the Bella Vista Police Department was able to obtain a Honda ST1300. With the need to certify more officers than we had motorcycles at the time, a local motorcycle dealership allowed the department to lease motorcycles for use in the class. At the conclusion of the class, the dealership discounted motorcycles for the department to buy utilizing money from the city's drug fund. The motorcycles have proved to be

great addition and are utilized for traffic enforcement, escorts, and community outreach programs.

Another community driven need that was fulfilled was the addition of a bicycle patrol unit. This was a result the creation of a massive trail system in Bella Vista, approximately fifty-five (55) trails totaling ninety-one (91) miles, which was spearheaded by the City. As communities grow, so must departments. Focusing on specific, tangible goals based not only off of current needs, but projected needs as well is important. Seeing officers on the trails ensuring people are safe and looked after helped to gain confidence and trust from members of the community.

Until such a time that the department is able to add a division specifically for special operations, community outreach also falls on the Patrol Division. There are several ways to reach the community such as social media, Citizens Police Academy (CPA), town hall style meetings, and community events. The Bella Vista Police Department now takes part in a program called “Coffee with a Cop.” This program “opens the door for interactions outside of the crisis situations that typically bring law enforcement officers and community members together” (Coffee with a Cop, n.d.).

Another program that has been a success for Bella Vista is the Citizens Police Academy (CPA) has proven to be a great way to educate members of the public on the operations of the department. It gives select citizens of Bella Vista first-hand experience and knowledge of how the Bella Vista Police Department operates and works to keep the community safe. It has proved to be so successful and the level of interest so high, there is a competitive process for acceptance

into the program. This level of transparency leads to a better relationship with members of the community.

A strong, active social media presence is a great way to show the public your department's commitment to that transparency. It is a great way to keep the public informed on things the department is working towards, as well as things to watch out for such as scams. The Bella Vista Police Department also uses these social media platforms to notify citizens of state mobilizations we are assisting in and emergency situations actively happening that impact the community, such as major accidents. Sharing pictures and stories of the department attending events and being seen in a variety of places shows the community the importance your department places on being engaged in the community. Department leaders may feel that the openness with the public makes them vulnerable, but "While transparency may seem risky, it is almost always the better choice" (Fuentes 2017).

The progression of a department's capabilities, programs, and staffing needs is a continuous evolution. Research, preparation, and anticipation of the challenges that will be faced when growing a department are the keys to a successful expansion. Keeping an open mind and being willing to listen to feedback from other departments, local organizations, and city leaders, will lead to more ideas, perspectives, and a sense of ownership from internal and external members. It is important to celebrate even the smallest of steps forward, because it's the direction of the step that matters, not the size. Knowing that some decisions will not be universally agreed with and that being the bad guy is inevitable, the best a leader can do is to focus on what is best for the department and the community it serves and push forward.





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