

# SAVANNAH:

## *Transferring Offsite Learning Into Neighborhood Beats*

The Advancing Community Policing Grant .....69

Department Observations .....73

Panel Commentary .....74

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## *Transferring Offsite Learning Into Neighborhood Beats*

### **The Advancing Community Policing Grant**

#### ***Background***

The Savannah Police Department requested grant money for a project called Community Oriented Policing Innovation and Experimentation Strategies (COPIES). The project was designed to improve leadership and managerial skills and encourage experimentation with new community policing ideas. “We hoped to increase the likelihood that captains, lieutenants, and sergeants would make bold decisions to do things differently,

to try new approaches, and to emulate the success of other departments,” said Major Dan Reynolds. “We wanted to encourage risk taking.” The project had three primary goals:

- To establish a permanent mindset among patrol managers and supervisors that will continue to promote operational changes within the department beyond the conclusion of the grant.
- To provide onsite training.
- To conduct site visits to other departments with good track records for community oriented policing.

## SAVANNAH POLICE DEPARTMENT

**LOCATION:** SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

**CHIEF:** DAN FLYNN

**CONTACT:** WWW.SAVANNAHPD.ORG

**ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE CATEGORY:** LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**AMOUNT FUNDED:** \$198,525

**SITE VISIT:** FEBRUARY 22, 2001

## DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Savannah, Georgia was established in 1733. Savannah's population of approximately 131,510 is 56.8 percent black, 37.9 percent white, 1.5 percent Asian, and 1.5 percent other.\* The city covers 80 square miles. Savannah's historic district is visited by more than five million tourists each year.

\* U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

The Savannah Police Department has 405 sworn officers and employs 95 civilians and 51 part-time school crossing guards. The department is divided into four bureaus: the Patrol Bureau, the Criminal Investigations Bureau, the Information Management Bureau, and the Support Services Bureau. The Patrol Bureau is divided into four precincts that

are designed to be accessible to Savannah's citizens.

The department implemented community oriented policing in 1991, and the process has been evolving ever since. Most recently, the focus has been on neighborhood geography, with an emphasis on collecting data, solving neighborhood problems, and providing services to citizens in specific geographic areas.

### The Project

Savannah's Advancing Community Policing (ACP) project used several strategies/approaches, each of which is described in this section:

- Targeting mid-level management
- Training
- Site visits
- Replication and adaptation
- Neighborhood beat approach
- Problem solving
- ArcView mapping system and CompStat
- Savannah Impact

**Targeting Mid-Level Management.** The ACP grant primarily targeted mid-level management in the Patrol Bureau, which has the most citizen contacts. Prior to the ACP project, Savannah's four precincts operated identically: upper management dictated how policing would be done.

"We were holding our supervisors and managers accountable for the move to community oriented policing, but we did not have their interest and support," Major Reynolds noted. "We hoped that sending supervisors and officers to other cities to see community policing firsthand would win their support. I believe we were successful, since most of those who traveled came back invigorated and more willing to accept new policing strategies."

**Training.** The grant supported training through a course titled "Value-Centered Leadership," that

was taught first to all lieutenants, captains, majors, and the chief, and next to all sergeants and key civilian personnel. Participants thought the training was outstanding and recommended it to other departments.

"We were able to conduct valuable training in leadership and expand the patrol officer's role in community oriented policing, through training provided by internationally known experts," said Reynolds. "This would not have occurred without supplemental funding." Reynolds said the training exposed personnel at all levels of the department to new ideas and experiences, which improved their attitudes toward community oriented policing.

**Site Visits.** To learn more about community policing, all 33 sergeants, eight lieutenants, and four captains in the Patrol Bureau were required to go

on the road. The department worked with the COPS Office to get a list of departments noted for their community policing. Guidelines were developed for the preparation of site visit reports.

Four-person teams of individuals from various ranks and precincts fanned out to 14 departments across the country and Canada. Upon their return, they were required to document their findings. The departments visited were:

- Austin, Texas
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina
- Cleveland, Ohio
- Delray Beach, Florida
- Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
- Fort Worth, Texas
- Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- Mesa, Arizona
- Overland Park, Kansas
- Portland, Oregon
- Reno, Nevada

- Sacramento, California
- San Antonio, Texas
- Seattle, Washington

The benefits of these visits were numerous:

- Attendees discovered successful programs in other cities that could be replicated in Savannah. For example, the Savannah Crime Free Housing Program was inspired by a similar program in Mesa, Arizona.
- Exposure to different environments prompted mid-level managers to institute new programs and a new way of doing business.
- Officers developed important contacts in other police departments.
- Officers acquired a deeper appreciation for community oriented policing after seeing it in action.
- Morale improved among mid-level managers, who were given the chance to travel and to learn and incorporate new ideas and procedures.

**Replication and Adaptation.** The site visit to Mesa, Arizona gave Savannah the idea for the

Savannah Crime Free Housing Program, which focuses on crime prevention in privately owned apartment complexes. Using a certification process, property managers oversee such things as criminal-unfriendly lease agreements, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), and resident neighborhood watch programs.

A three-phase certification process requires rental properties to meet certain crime prevention criteria and takes from three months to a year to complete. The three phases consist of:

- The requirement of an eight-hour training session for apartment management.
- The implementation of strict security and building requirements for the property.
- The enhancement of crime prevention education and awareness among tenants.

Twenty of Savannah's 150 apartment complexes are now fully certified as Crime Free Housing and 20 others are working on their certification. The voluntary program has reduced calls for service by 20 to 70 percent (depending on the type of crime). "Crime overall has decreased, with calls related to drugs, fighting, threats to life, disorderly persons,

and juvenile complaints the most reduced,” according to Corporal Tracy Walden, the project’s coordinator. “We’re also seeing an increase in calls reporting things like suspicious persons, which is a good change. It shows that tenants are taking a more active role in reducing the likelihood of crime, buying into the program, and taking back claim to their surroundings.”

In addition, each apartment complex receives an economic benefit because it can advertise itself as a “certified Crime Free Housing Community.” This is an advantage in that it attracts potential renters and has led to lower turnover among current tenants.

The Savannah Police Department has also partnered with the Savannah College of Art and Design, which owns 41 buildings in the city, mostly in the downtown area. The college is a major player in the city’s revitalization efforts. The school has incorporated CPTED concepts into its curriculum, and the police department has conducted a CPTED evaluation of each building. The college also has agreed to install emergency phones around the campus.

From their site visit to the police department in Overland Park, Kansas, officers from Savannah learned about the Construction Site Theft Task Force, which has drastically reduced construction

site thefts. Savannah now produces a pamphlet that is given to each company that applies for a construction permit. The pamphlet outlines measures the construction company can take to reduce theft from its sites, including instituting CPTED measures, securing and labeling tools and equipment, and getting contact information for both police agencies involved.

A site visit to Sacramento, California prompted interest in the Secondary Education Law Enforcement Cadet Training program. A partnership between the Savannah Police Department and the Chatham Board of Education, the overall goal of the program is to provide quality law enforcement technical skills to secondary school students, while deterring their entry in the criminal justice system. This project is under consideration.

**Neighborhood Beat Approach.** In July 2000, Savannah instituted a new beat structure that makes neighborhood boundaries the basic geographic unit for delivering police services. One sergeant is assigned to each beat as the liaison for that beat, having 24-hour accountability regarding program efforts. Permanent beat officers, who cross shifts, meet with the beat sergeant and other beat officers for monthly updates.

Beat officers take calls for service and use “uncommitted” time to work on beat problems.

The goal is for officers to stay in their assignments for three to four years before they transfer.

Calls from the community generally go directly to the sergeants. Sergeants then use community meetings to disseminate information and take questions from the community.

A major benefit of the program has been improving the public’s access to the police by giving them someone to call. In addition, by inviting citizens to the table, greater trust and understanding has developed between neighborhood residents and the police. There has also been an increase in accountability, with sergeants taking active ownership of their neighborhoods and becoming increasingly responsive to local problems.

Sergeants have learned that it is important to:

- Include neighborhoods in planning and determine the role of citizens.
- Listen carefully to the community’s view of the problem and be candid about what they can and cannot do to solve it.
- Educate the community regarding the role of police.
- Assign self-motivated police officers to these beats.

- Let officers know they could lose their beats for nonperformance.
- Develop departmentwide support for community policing.
- Facilitate a group effort to solve problems instead of requiring the officer to take sole responsibility.

Savannah has won an award from the International City Management Association for implementing the neighborhood beat approach.

**Problem-Oriented Policing.** Overtime funds from the ACP grant were used to work on problem-solving projects using the scanning, analysis, response, and assessment (SARA) model. The SARA model has been used to close down bars, solve parking problems, and change city ordinances concerning the public consumption of alcoholic beverages. The department has developed a standard format for recording problem-oriented policing projects. The SARA model is taught in classes, and many officers now use SARA as standard operating procedure.

#### **ArcView Mapping System and CompStat.**

Several site visits allowed supervisors to observe the crime analysis function in other departments.

They found that many departments used ArcView software for the geographic analysis of crime. Savannah had not been fully utilizing the capabilities of geographic information systems (GIS). After it acquired and implemented the ArcView GIS system, the department began using its own version of the CompStat model of crime analysis and police resource management to help solve problems, reduce crime, and deploy resources.

**Savannah Impact.** One of the department's new initiatives is Savannah Impact, which is designed to rehabilitate habitual violent offenders by simultaneously providing social services and intensive supervision. The initiative is a collaboration among the Savannah Police Department, probation and parole offices, the juvenile court, the Gateway Community Service Board, and the Georgia Department of Labor.

Parolees and probationers in the program will receive increased correctional supervision; they also will have direct access to remedial education, job training, job placement, substance abuse counseling, mental health assistance, and any other services necessary for their rehabilitation. The goal is to identify the 600 most violent adult offenders and 100 most violent juvenile offenders, then

work to make them productive members of society and thereby prevent recidivism.

## **Department Observations**

The organizational change to community policing has been evolving slowly. Cultural change within the department has been the most critical factor. Officers now routinely talk in terms of problem solving, something that was foreign when problem-oriented approaches were first introduced more than 10 years ago.

According to Brian Renner, Savannah's planning and research coordinator, "The police department embraces community policing as a philosophy, rather than a program or special unit. We believe that there is never a finished state of community policing, but instead are always looking to improve the way we provide services."

"We are always evolving and adapting to the needs of our community," adds Major Reynolds. "As the environment changes, you continually adapt and seek to improve your service to your customers. I think we will always be asking, 'Are we there yet?'"



## Panel Commentary

The programs initiated by Savannah would not have been possible without the ACP grant. Like Savannah, many agencies are precluded from undertaking progressive programs because they are at a subsistence level of funding. It is commendable that Savannah used the ACP grant to invest in as many of its current and future leaders as practical, and that it involved the COPS Office in identifying the most instructive agencies for site visits.

It is refreshing to see an institutional process of accountability following a site visit by an employee. Many agencies do not follow through with reporting requirements when they send their employees to out-of-state training, conferences, or site visits. The value of these relatively modest investments in people is immense, but that value is lost if it is not documented in a systematic and comprehensive way. Capturing lessons learned and innovations gleaned from site visits is one way to ensure continued support for programs that to some appear to be perks of small worth.

Departments commonly have limited outside reference beyond what individuals learn from schools, conferences, or research. It is rare for departments to engage in primary research to study the methods of other departments; doing so ultimately forces individuals to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of their own departments.

Many of the programs initiated as a result of Savannah's site visits have been in existence elsewhere for some time (e.g., Crime Free Housing certification, Neighborhood Beat programs, ArcView-based CompStat, and others). It is commendable that the Savannah Police Department translated observations from other jurisdictions into action. The ambitious implementation of this array of significant programs is also remarkable.

The concepts that constitute the Savannah Impact program are commendable. If the goals of this program were ever realized, there would be significant interest on a national level. The array of services identified to help rehabilitate chronic recidivist offenders is dauntingly expensive.

Nevertheless, the ambitious commitment of the Savannah Police Department to pursuing this program is worthy of recognition. The panel hopes that Savannah will be able to report a successful methodology to other police agencies eager to find solutions to a nationwide problem that has been marked more by failures than success. The Savannah Police Department has distinguished itself by engaging in primary research, which must have had a unifying effect on the entire department.

Sending all patrol supervisors on study trips brings support for community policing and innovation to the forefront. It allows these individuals to grow as police officers, to take chances in a new environment, to try new working relationships, and to positively change how they view their own jobs. Including first-line supervisors in site visits gives them a sense that they are valued members of the department whose opinions are important. This is very important for obtaining buy-in, which is, in turn, critically important to the ultimate success of the community oriented policing program.

