



## Successful Practices & Strategies

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# Galax Police Department

Galax, Virginia

<https://www.facebook.com/GalaxPD>

### Community policing element

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Organizational change

### Problem/issue

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Using information and intelligence in policing

### Problem description

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The Galax Police Department (GPD) by definition is a rural agency (24 sworn members) with limited resources to fund the increased demand for police services. There was an obvious need to become more efficient.

There are 16 members assigned to uniform patrol; at any given time, eight are assigned to work, and eight are off duty. A separation was created that caused voids in information and a lack of continuity in efforts. The GPD realized that it was collecting large amounts of data that were not being used.

Consistently, the crime rate per 100,000 populations caused the GPD to be ranked in the top 10 crime rates year after year in Virginia; the GPD was consistently higher than metropolitan areas of Virginia (e.g., Richmond and Virginia Beach). The GPD had efforts to implement a data-driven model of policing without success. The GPD continued to be reactive.

### Community policing strategies implemented

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The city was split into three geographical areas based on call volume and reported crimes and not size. One member of each shift became responsible for that geographic area and was encouraged to “think outside the box.” Bicycle patrols were expanded from the downtown area into the three zones. Citizen interaction became a priority both in the residential and business communities. The GPD implemented a SARA model of problem solving into field training to familiarize new hires with the process. Officers were encouraged to work in teams within their zones to target problems.

### Change and/or impact as a result of these community policing efforts

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In fiscal year 2012, the GPD was funded by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services to design and implement a model of intelligence-led policing that was replicable in like-sized agencies. The program, while not funded by the COPS Office, is federally funded by Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant funds passed through to Virginia.



In recent years, the GPD implemented the following changes:

- The GPD became very transparent through the use of social media. Its Facebook page became a platform for sharing information with the community. The GPD quickly discovered that Facebook was an efficient way to quickly share information about crime, community events, and anything of interest. In a community of approximately 7,000 people, it is not unusual to reach more than 4,000 people with a post. An unexpected benefit was the number of Facebook messages we receive from people who would not call the police. The calls range from requests for information to crime information that has resulted in solving crimes and recovery of stolen property.
- The GPD examines calls for service and reported crime on a daily basis. It sends each member of the police department intelligence bulletins via e-mail as often as needed.
- The GPD placed a new emphasis on documentation of police-citizen interaction, requiring documentation in "Terry Stops," which are tracked.
- The GPD's volume of crime doesn't support a CompStat model with weekly meetings. In lieu of that, a detective meets with each shift at least every six weeks to discuss crime trends and hotspots.
- Each member of the GPD gets a daily electronic roll call bulletin via e-mail that summarizes activity in 72-hour increments.
- Shift sergeants were given autonomy to change staffing levels and work hours based on their observations without approval of command staff to address perceived needs in each individual zone.
- The GPD stresses the importance of not placing knowledge into a "silo" but rather sharing that information among the agency and its adjoining jurisdictions.

The following are a result to the above changes:

- The GPD strives to make every decision based on the best available information. In the first year of the project, the GPD reported a 14% decrease in crimes against a person. In 2013, the GPD experienced an 8% reduction in reported crime.
- The GPD deploys resources to address traffic enforcement with an emphasis on high visibility. When compared to 2012, traffic accidents in 2013 decreased 18%, and accidents with injury decreased 43%.
- The community has benefited from the program.



## Lessons learned through program implementation

One of the biggest lessons that the chief of police learned was that he was making this project too complex. The GPD is not New York. While The GPD has many of the same issues, its volume of demand for services does not support New York's model of intelligence-led policing. The GPD adapted CompStat to its size and economic resources. The only real major expense was procurement of a software package and the continued support for that product. The current yearly assessment is less than \$2,000 to provide the software support.

Transparency is not a bad thing; the community as a whole is interested in what's happening and willing to help. Thus, the GPD constantly develops investigative leads by posting information and asking for help.

Members of the GPD have been receptive to the increased flow of information; the generation of police officers the GPD employs thrives on the flow of information and having it readily available.

The GPD is solving cases because of the availability of information. Two years ago, a police officer would not have been able to query a database and discover who was in the area of a burglary or larceny; now they can.

Funding is not an excuse; the zone designations were made using Excel and extracted information from our RMS database. A 911 staff member with Excel expertise assisted with placing the data into a useable format.

Visibility in a community is important. The GPD implemented a fuel saving strategy twice in the past two years. The strategy was a trainee's problem-solving project that was brilliantly simple. His project was parking an unmanned, marked police cruiser in a conspicuously visible location while the officer who would be driving it either used a bike to patrol or doubled up in a second vehicle. The visibility has measurably affected crime, complaints, and traffic problems.

If you believe in the SARA model, the assessment phase is critically important. If a response is not working, egos can't get in the way. Everyone has to be willing to drop back to analyses and response until the GPD start making a difference.

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