



Public Policy and Management Center at Wichita State University Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs

WICHITA POLICE DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Michael L. Birzer, Director, Wichita State University School of Community Affairs
Andra J. Bannister, Director, Wichita State University Regional Community Policing Training Institute
Misty Bruckner, Director, Public Policy and Management Center
Stephanie Knebel, Project Associate, Public Policy and Management Center

Issue

Recent national events and local actions have heightened awareness of the critical relationship among law enforcement, residents and ultimately local government and public service professionals. Due to the volume of public interactions, number of employees, and critical functions that public safety represents, a police department is a fundamental representation of local government to its citizenry. Creating a high performing police department is critical to the officers, organization, and most importantly the community. The organizational assessment for the City of Wichita Police Department identified critical issues and provided findings to assist the department in preparing for the hiring of a new chief of police. Much more scrutiny and deliberation must take place to address long-term systemic issues and community expectations. The Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC, formerly the Center for Urban Studies) at Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs (HWS) and the Department of Criminal Justice, all at Wichita State University (WSU), was requested to assist with the project. The purpose of this consultation was to conduct an organizational assessment to provide a blueprint for the Wichita Police Department (WPD) and the hiring of the next chief of police.

Protocol or Alternatives

The WSU team was tasked to:

1. *Provide research of best practices on specific topics (Racial Profiling and Community Policing):*
The WSU team, led by faculty members Michael L. Birzer, Professor and Director, School of Community Affairs, and Andra Bannister, Professor of Criminal Justice and Director of Regional Community Policing Training Institute, created an overview of best practice research on critical issues for the WPD. Community policing, racial profiling and community relations were the primary focus of the research. This research is integral to establishing the foundation for recommendations in the report. Attachments of supporting documents are provided at the end of the report.
2. *Engage internal and external stakeholders to identify assets, issues of concern and ideas on the future direction of the WPD:* To initiate stakeholder engagement, interviews were conducted with key individuals within the department and with community partners.

These informed interviews helped define the questions and processes for the internal and external focus groups. Approximately 25 additional external stakeholder groups participated in the engagement process. Groups represented other law enforcement agencies, public and nonprofit service organizations, neighborhood and community organizations, and faith-based institutions. One open public meeting session was also conducted. The purpose of the external stakeholder meetings was to provide opportunities for interested citizens to provide insight to their experience and expectations for the Wichita Police Department.

The primary goal in creating internal focus groups was to provide as many employees as possible with the opportunity to provide input. WPD provided a list of employees by rank (officer, sergeant, etc.), assignment (security, animal control, etc.), and shift. Through a random sample selection process a total of 275 (36%) employees from across the department were invited to participate in an internal focus group. In the end, 195 employees (nearly 25%) from across the department attended a focus group. The PPMC analyzed the qualitative information provided during the focus groups to quantify the most common issues. The intent of the analysis was to be able to prioritize the information provided.

3. *Review critical information to include current WPD demographics, planning documents, recent reports, and identified policies and procedures to ascertain strengths and opportunities for improvement:* In identifying critical issues through the focus groups and informed interviews, the PPMC investigated opportunities to provide qualitative data or information to address the issues. For example, the loss of the traffic unit and impact on the safety was mentioned several times in focus groups. The PPMC then compared the number of accidents, injuries and vehicle deaths to peer communities. Through the research, the PPMC was able to confirm that the City of Wichita was at the high end of traffic safety incidents.
4. *Provide recommendations for the selection process for the next chief of police and direction of the WPD.*

Findings

Findings were divided between community relations and administrative issues. Improving community relations was identified as an issue by WPD leadership and community organizations. Finding opportunities to build relations, create understanding between community members and WPD about police activities, and provide for more open communication are paramount for the future success of the department. Critical recommendations include:

1. *Community Policing:* While community policing was considered a successful policy direction and philosophy for the department, there was a need to evaluate the implementation and

structure of community policing. The findings were to ensure the community policing philosophy is embraced by the entire Department; not only a stand-alone unit that creates. Since this has significant community and department impact, the finding was to develop a transition and implementation plan prior to the hiring of the next chief of police by creating a Transition Team comprised of WPD staff and community members.

2. *Body Cameras:* WPD had already completed significant work and the direction was to continue with implementation and communicate progress regularly to the community.
3. *Citizens with Mental Health Issues:* Findings were to develop an implementation plan for all officers to attend mental health training.
4. *Racial Profiling Training:* There is a need to make racial profiling, or fair and impartial police training, and cultural diversity/sensitivity training as hands-on as possible. Recommendations were to engage police officers in active role-playing and problem-solving learning exercises and to include citizens of diverse cultures in the training.
5. *The Pretext Stop:* Because citizens are largely unaware of the legalities of the pretext stop, WPD needs to educate the community on racial profiling. In addition, the WPD is developing policies to provide documentation on all traffic stops.
6. *Demographic and Workforce Comparison:* Lack of departmental diversity is not unique to the WPD; law enforcement agencies across the country are challenged by this issue. Developing targeted recruitment and retention plans, mentoring and support systems will be critical for future success.
7. *Wichita Police Department Community Advisory Board:* Findings were to establish a new Community Advisory Board for the purpose of working with the police department and to improve relations between WPD and the community. This new advisory board would provide community perspective on important policy, programs and priorities of the department. A standing committee of this advisory board would serve as the City Manager Review Board (CMRB). This committee would review cases on police conduct and administrative issues that are appealed by citizens.
8. *Volunteers:* Use of volunteers is particularly crucial in an environment challenged with financial hardships. Thinking of creating ways that volunteers can be utilized and thinking beyond the way law enforcement has used them in the past will prove to be most beneficial.
9. *Use of Force and Community Incidents:* Findings were to create a proactive information campaign on the use of force, and the related police policies and procedures and to develop standard procedures to follow after an incident occurs to inform the public and media.

Numerous internal, or administrative issues, were identified during focus groups with police department employees. These issues reflect significant opportunities for the WPD to improve internal operations and thus the morale of the department.

1. *Response Time:* Increase in response times by more than a minute on priority calls in the past five years and being below national benchmarks, was identified as an area for action. Findings were to investigate the significant changes in the types of calls. Inventory and prioritize special assignments.
2. *Leadership Transition:* In the past three years, the WPD experienced a leadership change at all ranks (detective, sergeant, lieutenant, captain and deputy chief) ranging from 39 percent to 91 percent. This significant transition led to needs to establish a leadership and management development program to support the current department leadership and prepare for the next generation.
3. *Organizational Structure:* Due to recruitment challenges, unfilled positions and a concern about deployment, findings were to complete a staffing analysis with the primary purpose of ensuring that an appropriate allocation and deployment of officers is meeting current service demands.
4. *Traffic Unit:* Based on previously mentioned data, the recommendation was to evaluate the impact of reinstating the traffic unit or developing alternatives to address officer time on traffic accidents and decreasing accidents.
5. *Workload:* Data indicated a decline in the number of calls by officers per shift and decline in other productivity indicators. Recommendations are to analyze data from the Officer Daily Activity Reports (ODAR) to determine what deployment changes can be made and drill deeper with officers on time consuming activities. Also to complete a workload assessment to create more understanding on what changes can be made for the best use of officer time.
6. *Discipline:* Although data did not indicate significant change in disciplinary incidents, actions or findings, both internal and external expressed concern on equity and timeliness. Findings were to provide clarification, training and set forth expectations on what types of infractions should be handled by frontline supervisors and what cases need to be sent to Professional Standards. Also, to annually distribute information, both internally and externally, about the number of cases, length of investigations and findings.
7. *Intelligence-Led Policing:* Several areas of improvement were identified to enhance intelligence-led policing, including deployment structure and software needs.
8. *Recruitment:* The WPD has experienced a 55 percent decline in applicants completing the initial screening from 2011-2014. Findings include further research on specific reasons for decline and development of a comprehensive recruitment plan.
9. *Promotional Process:* Improvements for the promotional process include review written tests to ensure alignment with skill set needed and to assess timeframe and process improvements.
10. *Training:* Findings related to training included to identify external resources that can be used for training at minimal or reduced costs; develop continuous supervisor and leadership training and explore co-sponsorship with other regional law enforcement agencies; and hire a non-commissioned staff person with expertise in training and development to provide consistency for the department through leadership changes and focused on adult learning.

11. *Internal Communications:* Communication was a priority issue based on stakeholder feedback. Findings were to hire a noncommissioned employee with a communication background to assist the commissioned leadership.
12. *Inter-Agency Relations:* Based on conversation with WPD and the Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office, findings were to develop priorities, work plans and timeframes to investigate and report potential cooperative efforts between the two organizations.

Initial cooperative ventures include:

- Co-locate Narcotics
- Co-locate Property and Evidence
- Co-locate Records Section
- Share the cost of a polygrapher
- Joint technology purchases
- Provide regional Training for Leadership and Management

Police Chief Hiring

Responses from all focus groups and one-on-one interviews about the qualities of the next chief of police were fairly consistent. Based on community feedback and information presented in the *"Selecting a Police Chief: A Handbook for Local Government"* publication from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), a selection process for the City of Wichita was prepared. Key findings include:

- Engaging a firm that specializes in hiring police chiefs.
- Establish a Community Advisory Search Committee as a way to ensure an open and transparent process and to ensure broad community participation.
- Both internal and external focus groups expressed the need to have department employees and community members meet the finalists and provide input to the City Manager.
 - Structured interviews would be scheduled involving representatives from community groups,
 - Structured interviews would be held internally with department heads, representatives from non-commissioned employees, FOP leadership, and command staff.
 - A Community Meet and Greet would be scheduled to provide an opportunity for even more community input.

Impact

The WPD is currently in the process of prioritizing and implementing the findings from the report. An internal project team is responsible for the implementation plan. In addition, the City Manager has proceeded with the recommendations for hiring the next chief of police. The assessment also provided both qualitative data collection to understand perspectives from employees and citizens; and quantitative data analysis for the organization to address future issues and provide a guidebook for the next chief.

An organizational assessment conducted by an external entity during a time of transition provides an opportunity for broad evaluation of the issues, needs and perspectives of stakeholders to best equip the next leader for success.

Summary

Through the organizational assessment, the City of Wichita was able to assess the current issues, priorities the needs of the WPD to improve the selection process for the next chief of police and to provide the new leadership a solid foundation for direction for the department. By engaging internal and external stakeholders, the City of Wichita was able to build trust, relations and support for the future of the department. With an organization of this size and complexity, there are always many challenges and areas for improvement. More importantly for the WPD, there are incredible opportunities due to the committed personnel of the department, support of the City of Wichita and the Wichita community.