

Alexandria Police Department

Data Refinement & Transparency Plan

Introduction

The Alexandria Police Department (APD) has been collecting data on officer activity, crime and traffic within the city for decades. Officer activity has been generally collected to track officer work performance. Crime data has been collected to assist APD in the implementation of its hot spots patrol approach to crime occurring in the city. This approach tracks the temporal and spatial aspects of crime incidents in an effort to deploy APD assets as a crime intervention strategy. The department has been successful over the years applying this approach and has received some positive external recognition for its efforts.

Traffic crash data has been a specific concern for APD over the years. The adoption of the Vision Zero effort by the city made the accuracy and completeness of traffic crash data even more important. Subsequently, APD has been reviewing its traffic crash data platform to make this data more useful for all the departments that rely on it.

APD started to examine its data needs and what was currently being captured in data collection processes in the spring of 2017. At the same time, APD introduced a new records management system (RMS) technology which would enable APD to mine multiple data collection files/servers and ultimately enhance its data utilization. For example, the new system enables APD staff to access real time information collected from electronic source data collection points. It also allows staff to connect Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) information collected by the Department of Emergency Communications with APD data files. The new software is installed. Beta testing and final corrective programming is close to completion as well. This progress has enabled APD to identify opportunities to improve its data collection efforts to assist in improving its understanding of officer activities and the nature of crime within the City.

The review of the data available through the new RMS technology was assessed in conjunction with a review of the data needs that APD has today. APD identified several action items that require attention in order to meet its needs. The ensuing discussion outlines the actions APD has identified for officer activity, crime analysis and traffic safety.

Officer Activity Data Collection

Assessment of Current Data and Needs

Both rank and file officers and the supervision/management team in APD were concerned about the current data collected on officer activity. A group of these individuals volunteered to conduct a review of these current data collection protocols and made recommendations designed to improve the process. The following is a synopsis of what was discovered:

- Some officer activity is currently captured by electronic source documents, e.g.; traffic citations issued. Other information is captured through a separate reporting form prepared by the individual officer. The latter is considered duplicative in many cases and data inconsistencies do occur related to data entry.
- The APD review of data needs also revealed the separate activity reporting does not include all the activity an officer might perform during their shift. For example, officers on a community policing effort do not get any credit for the activities they perform during this effort because that information is not captured.
- The review also revealed there were a number of significant gaps in the activity reporting system. For example, APD did not capture any data on traffic stops where a citation was not issued. Both the officers and management were interested in filling these gaps.
- There were also opportunities to include information suggested in the 21st Century Policing report which currently not available in the APD data sets.

Required Action & Implementation

The review team also developed recommendations designed to address their identified data gaps and take advantage of opportunities to improve the quality, accuracy and timeliness of the data APD collects. The following recommendations were presented to APD management and approved for implementation:

- The 15A (field contact) form will be expanded to capture the missing data on officer activity that was identified. It will capture information on stops, information and assist contacts, community outreach efforts and other activities not currently collected. It will also include subject demographic data related to the activity performed by the officer as suggested in the 21st Century Policing report.
- Source documents will also need to be reviewed to ensure they contain information that would be useful in tracking officer effort. Whenever possible, information from source documents should be used to automatically populate required officer activity fields.
- The new data collection effort will distinguish between officer activity related to calls for service and those initiated by the officer while on duty. This will require some programmatic changes to the existing data collection program for officer activity.
- Additional programmatic changes will be made to ensure that CAD information collected will be used as appropriate to populate APD officer activity data.

- The use of source documentation to collect officer activity data eliminates the need for the separate reporting and data entry processes and will reduce data entry error. It will also provide a more detailed understanding of officer activity. Both rank and file officers and supervisors/management have been suggesting this old reporting process be replaced for some time. The new process would allow APD to eliminate the old reporting process and should result in more accurate and timely information.
- Beta testing on this new data collection was started in July 2017 and will conclude in January 2018. This testing has identified the need to make additional programming adjustments. *The new officer activity reporting system will be operational by the end of January 2018.*

Crime Data Collection

Assessment of Current Data and Needs

As noted earlier, APD has been collecting crime data to meet its required reporting responsibilities. It also has been using temporal and spatial crime data in its evidence-based hot spots policing efforts. APD management wanted to increase its understanding of the nature of the crime the city experiences and asked its data analysis staff to look at the possibility of applying some epidemiological approaches to its examination of crime data. There have been a number of meetings on current data mining efforts and data gaps related to the crime data issue. These discussions have resulted in the following observations:

- The temporal and spatial information currently collected is sufficient for APD needs. However, APD needs to explore the possibility of improving location information and make it more specific, e.g.; housing unit numbers.
- There are opportunities to improve the synchronization of CAD data with crime reporting data to streamline the process. This will also improve data accuracy and timeliness.
- Currently, much of the key epidemiological information is found in fields or text within the source documents that do not enable easy analysis.
- The absence of certain fields in the current reporting format presents missing data issues which make it difficult to fully understand important issues related to crime in the city.
- Closing data gaps and refining data collection programming along with temporal and spatial information currently available will lead to a more refined understanding of crime and the refinement of current interventions or even new interventions to stop crime.

Required Action & Implementation

Recommendations designed to address their identified data gaps and take advantage of opportunities to improve the quality, accuracy and timeliness of the data APD collects were started in August. The following recommendations were presented to APD management and were approved for implementation:

APD analysis staff will develop changes to the various reporting programs that can be developed to capture information which lead to a better understanding of the nature of crime in the city. Some of the initial information to be addressed include victim/suspect relationships or if they know each other; if the victim or suspects are city residents; and, demographic information on all involved in the report. It will also collect information as to the presence of mental health, substance abuse, and other social factors about the nature of crime which are currently embedded in report narratives and cannot be easily retrieved.

- These programming changes will be conducted and Beta tested during the remainder of 2017. Whenever possible, the contractor currently making RMS adjustments will be utilized. *APD anticipates the new crime reporting system will be operational by the end of 2017 or sooner. Annual baseline data collection is targeted to begin January 1, 2018.*

Traffic Data Collection

In August, APD completed its 2016 traffic crash data report. This took some time to complete as the APD analytical staff had to reconcile hundreds of reports to correct crash location information. This issue can be attributed to crash reporting format developed by the Commonwealth of Virginia which is used by APD. The preparation and critical review of the 2016 data led to several data collection issues which APD will attempt to address. The following observations and actions were made during this review:

Assessment of Current Data and Needs

- APD will need to develop training to assist officers in entering in standardized information concerning the crash location.
- APD needs to explore means to review and approve traffic crash reports prior to entry into the electronic file. This would be an effort to improve the accuracy of the data entry.
- Citation information is a manual process which delays the availability of data for use in planning for traffic related programs.

Required Action & Implementation

- APD is developing a method for standardizing location information for traffic related data and will provide training on the methodology before the end of 2017.
- APD will work with the Commonwealth of Virginia to provide suggestions to improve data collection in the statewide crash reporting format. This will be completed before the end of 2017.
- APD will explore the feasibility and costs associated with a conversion to electronic citation technology. This has been included as an objective in the strategic plan for its Field Operations and Administrative Services Bureaus and should be completed during FY 2018.