
ARCATA POLICE DEPARTMENT

TO: Michael Winkler, Mayor, City of Arcata
Paul Pitino, Vice Mayor, City of Arcata
Sophia Pereira, Council Member, City of Arcata
Brett Watson, Council Member, City of Arcata

FROM: Brian Ahearn, Chief of Police
Via Karen Diemer, City Manager

DATE: March 23, 2020

SUBJECT: National Police Foundation Report to the Arcata City Council, March 18, 2020



BACKGROUND: The National Police Foundation, NPF, was contracted by the City of Arcata to conduct a review of the Arcata Police Department's response to the stabbing of HSU student David Josiah Lawson in 2017. The NPF review was initiated to identify areas in which to improve Department operations. Concurrent to the review, the Police Department transitioned to a new Police Chief. This process was assisted by a period where the Department was led by a career retired interim Chief. Through the transition the leadership team of the Arcata Police Department conducted an internal review of Department operations, training and protocols. From this review the Police Department initiated several changes to Department operations as the NPF review continued. The implementation of the NPF recommendations, in addition to the internal changes either made or in progress, are opportunities to acknowledge areas where improvement was needed and to continue the process of incorporating industry wide best practices into the operations of the Arcata Police Department.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS: The NPF Assessment Team cited training, operational leadership, planning and supervision as areas to strengthen within the Arcata Police Department. The NPF report contains 36 recommendations; all of which have either been implemented or will be implemented. The recommendations are incorporated under 20 lessons learned; key areas identified by the NPF Assessment Team as important to improving Department operations.

The City has reviewed each recommendation. The Police Department has developed a plan of implementation and identified internal and external staff and resources who may be able to contribute to the implementation process. Staff will provide updates on the status of each recommendation to the City Council at future meetings. Staff's updates will allow the City Council to be informed on the progress of improvements,

inform the community on the status of each recommendation, to receive input from community members and to identify next steps in the implementation planning process.

CHANGES MADE/IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE: The Arcata Police Department, in adherence to best practices, has been conducting an on-going review of Department policies, protocols and operations. Of the 36 recommendations made by the NPF, 27 have already been implemented or in the process of being implemented. Many of the conclusions reached by the NPF Assessment Team were the same or similar conclusions made by APD staff in the on-going review process.

Department operational improvements included a re-structuring of Department operations, the creation of an Investigations Division, implementing NIMS and ICS principles in managing large scale incidents and providing training and leadership opportunities within the organization to support the career and skill development for all employees. The Department also instituted model community policing Police practices including establishing trust and credibility throughout visits to every Arcata neighborhood, hosting community events, opening the doors of the Arcata Police Department to the community, collaborating with the HSU community through events on and off campus, community outreach through Equity Arcata and by building an internship program prepared to launch by the Fall 2020 semester.

As mentioned before one of the Department changes made in response to an internal review was a re-structuring of the organization. This was implemented on September 8, 2019. There were three goals to the Department re-organization: to re-implement the Investigations Division; to reduce the span of control for the Detective Sergeant; and to streamline Department operations by more closely aligning personnel according to their duties within the organization.

An Investigations Division is needed in order to provide the City of Arcata with the contemporary law enforcement structure to conduct basic and complex investigations. The Investigations Division, once consisting of a lone Detective Sergeant, is now comprised of an Investigations Lieutenant, a Detective Sergeant, two Detectives and the newly created Police Evidence and Property Technician position. The Evidence Technician is a critical link to completing evidence-based investigations. The Evidence and Property Technician is the Department subject matter expert equipped with the training and experience to manage all facets of complex evidence preservation and collection while carrying out the day-to-day responsibilities of operating the police evidence and property room. Members of the Investigations Division have the training and expertise to manage the investigative process of complex and sophisticated criminal investigations. They respond to crime scenes as a team to assume command of the investigative process while providing direction to Patrol Officers on next steps in the preliminary investigation.

Originally, uniformed Officers were divided between two separate Divisions within the Police Department even though they shared a common function within the organization. All uniformed Officers are now assigned to Patrol; an area of Department operations they are more closely aligned with. The Patrol Lieutenant is now empowered to, and has the latitude to direct all uniformed Officers to specific tasks that achieve the goals of delivering core public safety services efficiently, reducing crime and improving the quality of life throughout Arcata.

During the re-structuring of the Department an Administrative Sergeant position was created and filled with existing staff. Prior to the creation of this position Emergency Preparedness, a priority of the City of Arcata, continued to be postponed and had no dedicated Police Department staff responsible for coordination and advancement. The Administrative Sergeant now manages Emergency Preparedness for the Department and develops and facilitates NIMS and ICS training. The Administrative Sergeant is also responsible for providing best practices briefing training, table top exercises for Police and other City employees, and coordinates de-briefing of major felony cases so that all APD personnel can continually learn from incidents already managed. In addition, the Administrative Sergeant provides direct supervision to the newly formed Community Response Unit. The Community Response Unit, CRU, is a team of Officers assigned to work with Environmental Services personnel to manage the environmental impacts of specific encampments, to respond to community and neighborhood level concerns of crime, to manage longer term projects that will reduce crime and improve the quality of life and who serve in other capacities including School Resource Officer.

The Patrol Team Sergeant position vacated through the creation of the Administrative Sergeant position is now supervised by a rotation of Field Training Officers who completed the Watch Commander training program and have the ability, as Acting Sergeants, to practically apply the skills they learned during training. Field Training Officers rotate every four months through this position; creating a base of knowledge, leadership, supervision and planning that is expected of a first-line supervisor.

This Department re-structuring positioned the Arcata Police Department to meet best practices policing standards while awaiting the results of the National Police Foundation review. The now published National Police Foundation report is an additional tool whose recommendations will be used as a roadmap for continued change as training, organizational leadership, planning and supervision continue to set the foundation for the future growth and development of the Arcata Police Department.