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Checklist to Assess Your Agency's Crime Analysis Capabilities

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Law enforcement agencies and jurisdictions across the United States are increasingly recognizing the importance of using crime analysis to disrupt crime patterns in their communities. However, the question that many agencies face is, "Where do we start?" Agencies may look for outside help to address their crime analysis needs. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC), for example, provides crime analysis training and technical assistance (/sites/default/files/documents/CAoD_fact.sheet_January_2020_v1.pdf) (TTA). However, while a third-party assessment of your unit may seem like the best first step, there are many practical steps that can be taken in-house that can help your agency move toward its crime analysis goals. In order to determine if you are ready to receive TTA, and to make sure it is customized for your specific needs, BJA NTTAC encourages reviewing the questions on the below checklist prior to requesting TTA.

Checklist and Recommendations: Staffing and Communication

There are standard best practices that agencies of all sizes can implement into their crime analysis units. Below is a checklist of questions and recommendations that may help you increase your unit's effectiveness and capacity.

Staffing

As in all organizations, staffing according to your needs and budget can be a barrier to meeting your agency's goals. These questions can be used to aid your agency's understanding on why properly staffing your unit is a win for everyone in the department. They may also help you create ways to meet your needs with your current resources.

- Does your unit have enough crime analysts to address your jurisdiction's needs? Do your current crime analysts feel like they can handle their workflow, or do they need more resources?
- What is the hiring process like, and what qualifications are specified when seeking to hire a crime analyst?
- Are there personnel in analytical positions that do minimal analytical work?
- Does the unit have a civilian crime analyst supervisor? If there are sworn officer analysts, what does turnover look like? Many units find that bringing in civilian analysts can bring continuity that is beneficial to the unit when sworn officers are assigned to other departments.
- What training have analysts received, and further, are analysts using their skills in their day-to-day tasks?
- Is there a commitment to ongoing training and professional development within the unit? Regularly attending trainings helps analysts stay up to date on current trends and practices that can bring new perspective to the department.

Communication

Communication is key to ensuring agencies maximize crime analysts' findings. Many agencies find that their crime analysis unit is siloed from the rest of the units in their agency. These questions may help your agency begin to break down barriers in communication in order to maximize crime analysts' work.

- Do your crime analysts communicate crime information with field personnel as they're working? In a fully functioning unit, crime analysts will be participating in both tactical and strategic analysis.
- Do your analysts have the ability to share images and videos with officers? While this may not appear to be the most important practice, feedback from officers emphasize how important it is for them to respond to crimes in real time.
- Do your analysts attend briefing meetings with officers? Departments find this to be an easy and practical step in encouraging intradepartmental communication.
- Is the crime analysis unit integrated into the decisionmaking process at the department?
- Does agency leadership attend crime analysis trainings? Many departments find this to be a helpful way for leadership to understand the work crime analysts are doing, as well as seeing how their work can be effective in fighting crime at a tactical and strategic level.
- Do the crime analyst supervisors know the agency's priorities so they can set short-term and long-term goals? If so, do the supervisors communicate those goals to their analysts?
- Does your unit network and partner with academic institutions, researchers, or other analysis centers? Doing so will expand your analysts' reach into other data sets and trends that may provide crucial information to your officers and agency.

Checklist and Recommendations: Reports and Technology

Some units find themselves developing the same reports each week without knowing what other types of reports can be developed. The below checklist can be used to identify various crime analysis products that may be helpful for your department and may not be a heavy lift for your analysts in the long run.

Crime Analysis Products

How many of the below products is your agency developing? As a note, this is not a comprehensive list of crime analysis products but can serve as a way to begin expanding your crime analysis unit's contributions.

- A dashboard to look at crime data, such as trends by shift/days/week(s) without needing to request a report from a crime analyst.
- Bulletins covering data such as crime series, trends, and patterns, people of interest, and target areas.
- Top calls for service covering information such as locations, types, days, times, and related factors.
- Top offender maps and lists using a data-driven approach to identify them. A social network analysis and/or point system is helpful here.
- Analysis of traffic collisions to cover where, when, and why, as well as other relevant factors such as crosswalks, lighting, and drunk driving.
- Analysis of parolees and probationers in relation to crime series and patterns.
- Frequent pawners and the connection to burglaries and vehicle break-ins.
- Analysis of the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network and other gun-related data including people, incidents, and places.
- Outstanding warrant lists.
- Analysis of intimate partner violence. Analysts should first create a process, using a relationship data field, to separate intimate partner violence from domestic violence.

Technology

Technology is crucial to the capabilities and productivity of your crime analysts. Your agency may find it helpful to consider what technologies your analysts need in order to obtain and hold the knowledge they need to succeed.

- Does your unit have access to Computer-aided Design (CAD) and Record Management System (RMS) data warehouse tables?
- Do your crime analysts have access to Geographical Information System (GIS) tools that can create crime hotspot maps and direct access to the GIS server and all relevant GIS layers?
- How available is the data? Analysts and unit supervisors should identify if there is a backlog in entry of reports from officers; if information from calls for service data is provided in a timely manner; if crime scene images are available; and if there is access to traffic information. If any of these are missing to the workflow of your analysts, creating paths to get this information can be a beginning step to improving your analytical products.
- Is the crime analysis unit in a centralized location that fosters interaction with the consumers of the unit's products? Additionally, who are the consumers of the unit's products?
- Do crime analysts have access to social media monitoring tools? As many agencies know, social media is becoming an increasingly important factor when investigating and responding to crimes. A standard best practice in the field is for analysts to have a way to search and monitor social media in real time as well as after a crime has been committed.
- Is there a list of crime analysis data and products circulated throughout your agency?

- Are your daily or weekly maps and reports automated? While it may take some time on the front end, automating regular reports and maps can save your analysts time in the long run and increase their capacity to create other products.
- Is your unit supported by your IT staff? Direct and consistent communication between analysts and IT staff is key to the work done by analysts.

Research and Resources

Research provides extensive information on how crime analysis benefits jurisdictions by identifying strategies to reduce crime. Compiled below are various resources that may be helpful to your agency as you are working toward your crime analysis capacity goals.

- Crime Analysis Product Bank (https://study.sagepub.com/santos4e2/student-resources/general-resources) (Sage Publishing), which includes a collection of products such as presentations, reports, maps, and patterns from crime analysts from police agencies across the country.
- International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA) White Papers (https://iaca.net/white-papers/), which discuss various crime analysis topics.
- IACA Resource Center (https://iaca.net/resources/), consisting of Planning for a Crime Analysis Program, articles, blogs, books, Crime Analysis Certificate Program, email list, news, software information, special topics, success stories, and tips.
- Standard Operating Procedures (https://iaca.net/development-center/standard-operating-procedures-sops/) (IACA), which provide a framework for a crime analysis unit.
- Hardware and Software Requirements (https://iaca.net/development-center/hardware-and-software-requirements/) (IACA), which outlines computer hardware and software applications needed to operate a crime analysis unit.
- Evaluation and Measuring Performance (https://iaca.net/development-center/evaluation-and-measuring-performance/) (IACA), designed specifically for evaluating crime analysts' work.

The above information is not an exhaustive list of resources and best practices but can be used to prepare staff and leadership to understand the potential of their crime analysis unit and what information your analysts need to succeed. If your agency is ready to take the next step and receive personalized TTA, BJA NTTAC has a host of subject matter experts who assist jurisdictions in beginning or building out their crime analysis capacities. To begin the process, BJA NTTAC recommends you start with reading through our Request TTA (/working-with-nttac/requestors) page on our website. Included on this page is a link to the form that you would complete and submit to BJA NTTAC so that we can adequately pair you with a subject matter expert to assist your agency. Types of questions asked on the form that your agency should consider include:

- How the requested TTA aligns with your agency's vision, mission, and goals.
- How leadership and current practices support implementing information and tools learned from the TTA.
- Current staff capacity and available technology of your crime analysis program, if applicable.
- Identifying current challenges and barriers.

Please do not hesitate to contact BJA NTTAC for help with developing your crime analysis capabilities. We know that crime analysis is crucial to your agency and to reducing crime, and we are here to assist you in any way that we can.

If your jurisdiction is in need of training or technical assistance related to crime analysis, or if you know of a community that would benefit from this type of assistance, please contact BJA NTTAC at BJANTTAC@ojp.usdoj.gov (mailto:BJANTTAC@ojp.usdoj.gov) and we can connect you to the appropriate training, assistance, TTA partner, and/or resources.

If you are interested in submitting the work of your organization or jurisdiction for consideration in a future TTA Today *blog post or in obtaining information related to a particular topic area, please email us at BJANTTAC@ojp.usdoj.gov (mailto:BJANTTAC@ojp.usdoj.gov).*

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