RTCC Development Decisions

Agencies interested in establishing an RTCC will need to consider a range of decisions regarding human (personnel and staffing plan) and technological resources, the chain of command, and the scope of work. There are numerous possible configurations for departments, depending on the size of the community, public safety needs, current capabilities, finances, and organizational capacity. The following sections offer some considerations that merit careful attention and planning.

Personnel and Staffing

With respect to human resources, the range of personnel decisions/options can include the following:

1) Staffing the RTCC with crime analysts (sworn and/or civilian, depending on the departmental structure)

2) Staffing the RTCC with current or former (retired) sworn officers/detectives

3) Staffing the RTCC using a hybrid model that includes civilian or sworn crime analysts and current or former sworn personnel

4) Staffing the RTCC with contractors (e.g., external contractors or perhaps retired officers who are under contract during retirement)

Staffing decisions may be based, in part, on whether the agency currently has crime analysis capabilities. Staffing the RTCC primarily with sworn personnel, versus crime analysts or other civilians, may make sense in some agencies, given that much of the work of RTCC personnel involves investigative work; speaking directly, in real time, to officers or detectives on the street; providing actionable intelligence; and essentially working cases. The skill set required to perform in this role, in part, includes familiarity with the geography of the community, investigative steps and processes, the day-to-day work of police officers and detectives/ investigators, and, more important, an understanding of how much information and actionable intelligence is necessary and sufficient for the officer/detective who is responding to a crime in progress. This is further highlighted in the need for determining when RTCC personnel should deliver information to officers on the street and when they should disengage. An RTCC captain explained this notion as follows:

> "RTCC detectives can talk directly to officers whereas it used to be just dispatchers. Dispatchers do not mind it. The biggest issue was we needed to encourage our folks (RTCC personnel) to be more assertive. They feel subservient to the cop on the street and they may undervalue the information they have available. Some were more proactive than others, some will not engage with the officer on the radio, but others will. My thought was "Let's get on the radio and tell them what we have." Some cops have not been happy about the extra chatter, but as a former shift

supervisor, we are not too busy out there. This is change and people needed to get used to it."

Agencies that develop their own RTCCs need to be clear on what their personnel will do, how they will engage those on the street, and what information may be most helpful to the officer(s) responding. This kind of law enforcement familiarity and experience is not likely to be available to civilian personnel.

Staffing an RTCC depends, in part, on how a department chooses to operate it. Some agencies have decided to staff their RTCCs with sworn personnel. This decision is aimed at staffing RTCCs with officers who have an investigative background. Sworn officers offer practical and investigative experience that police leaders determined was necessary for working effectively in an RTCC. This street-level experience provides RTCC staff members with a unique skill set that includes (1) familiarity with the geography of the community; (2) experience with investigations, the day-to-day job of police officers and detectives/investigators; and, more important, (3) an understanding of how much information is necessary when responding to an event in progress. Further, since RTCC sworn personnel are routinely communicating actively with officers in real time, they need to know how to efficiently deliver relevant information to officers on the street and when to disengage from the process.

Staffing RTCCs primarily with sworn personnel, versus civilians or crime analysts, seemed to make sense in many communities, given that much of the work of the RTCC personnel involves investigative work, speaking directly to officers or detectives on the street, providing actionable intelligence, and essentially working cases. However, some agencies have opted to hire civilian personnel with investigative backgrounds. It is possible that a hybrid approach would work well in many agencies, although relying primarily on civilian personnel is not recommended in most cases. Most civilians do not have the experience and background that is ideally suited for RTCC operations.

How can our current, or newly hired, crime analysts fit into a RTCC?

One of the major challenges that many law enforcement agencies may have when establishing a RTCC is whether staffing the RTCC should be an additional duty for crime analysts. It may be the case that utilizing trained crime analysts in a newly developed RTCC would not maximize their knowledge, skills, and expertise. However, if a department chooses to use crime analysts in its RTCC, additional training may help them to shift their focus from crime patterns, trends and series, to diagnosing and responding to crime events in real time. Historically, the job and expectations of a crime analyst vary considerably from those of RTCC personnel.

Clarifying roles/expectations of RTCC sworn personnel versus crime analysts: Minimizing overlap and resolving concerns about "who does what for whom"

The establishment of an RTCC, either in conjunction with a crime analysis unit/division or as a separate entity, requires careful consideration of the roles and expectations for each unit. Early discussions and delineations of roles and expectations for both departments can help eliminate duplication of work, limit confusion over roles and responsibilities, clearly define access to

information, and otherwise minimize territorial issues (including ownership of databases, dissemination of resources, etc.).

Some agencies may decide to establish both an RTCC and a crime analysis division. These two divisions may be organizationally separated entities, meaning that one is not a part of the other and that each reports to different supervisors. Given the different chains of command, there may be some confusion about when one division's involvement in a case begins or ends.

This confusion can be a potential cause of friction between the two units/divisions, but it can be resolved easily with some proactive decisions about who does what and when. For example, if a robbery is occurring and the RTCC is actively involved in the early stages of the investigation (e.g., following a suspect on camera, running license plates, checking electronic monitoring status), it may be unclear when the RTCC detective stops working on the investigation and crime analysis takes over. If a suspect is caught during the real-time period, this is a lesser concern, but if a suspect is not initially apprehended, the person or unit that has follow-up responsibility needs to be organizationally clarified. In other words, does the RTCC follow up to search databases to find leads, or is this now the job of crime analysis?

A secondary question is related to timing. If an incident occurs during evening or nighttime hours, when CAD is not typically staffed, should the RTCC continue working the event until a crime analyst is available? In this instance, the division of responsibility for the work could be either task-oriented or time-oriented. A clear delineation of job expectations and roles will help limit confusion.

There are two other major areas of consideration when developing an RTCC, with or without access to a crime analysis unit. The first is whether or not a crime analysis unit is already functioning in the department; the second is whether or not the crime analysis unit and the RTCC will be structured organizationally under the same chain of command.

Pre-Existing Crime Analysis Unit

For a department with a well-established crime analysis division, clearly written policies, procedures, and guidelines for how the RTCC will integrate with and augment the work of the crime analysis division will be helpful, preferably with input from the crime analysts. Input from the crime analysis unit will facilitate healthy future relationships between RTCC sworn personnel and crime analysts in a number of ways. First, identification of specific information needs can be proactively established. For example, many crime analysis divisions are not focused on immediate crime activities, but rather emphasize and assess crime trends and patterns. An RTCC can immediately assist officers and detectives, who need information in real time as they respond to a scene or follow a suspect.

Second, inviting the crime analysts into the planning process will help to proactively identify and resolve any issues of territoriality. Some crime analysis units have developed internally designed databases, search engines, or programs that are not expected to be used and accessed by a broader set of users. However, use of these databases or programs by the RTCC sworn personnel might be

necessary during the investigative stages of their work. Therefore, it is important to recognize and respect the proprietary nature of databases that the crime analysis units have developed over time.

Decisions on accessing CAD-developed information systems and databases

The overlapping functions of RTCC sworn personnel, as both initial call support and investigation and follow-up, can involve the utilization of data and databases that are traditionally used by crime analysts. Because of this overlap, there may be some concern from crime analysts about providing access to this data. These concerns may be exacerbated if the databases/search engines were developed within the crime analysis or if particular training is required to properly utilize these databases.

Agency does not have a Crime Analysis Unit

If a department does not currently have a crime analysis unit but is interested in building an RTCC, this is certainly possible. However, it is recommended that the agency consider developing the crime analysis unit first, or at least simultaneously, with an RTCC.

For an RTCC to be effective and function in real time, a crime analysis unit and crime analysis capabilities need to be present. An RTCC generally cannot replace a crime analysis unit, since each unit has distinctly different purposes. But if both divisions are developed simultaneously, many of the issues around roles and work expectations can be deliberately considered and resolved on the front end.

Embedded RTCC

If the RTCC is (or will be) embedded within the crime analysis division, some of these issues may be more easily resolved because the two divisions are expected to work in conjunction with each other. Task separation between the two divisions/sections could be divided along temporal and/or task lines, since the chain of command is likely the same for both divisions (and therefore analysts/officers are not responding to requests from different bosses).

External RTCC

If the RTCC is totally autonomous from the crime analysis unit, the clear delineation of roles and expectations is even more important. A clearly articulated set of protocols that indicate who responds to requests from particular people, during particular times, or regarding particular tasks, will help minimize issues around duplication of effort and will mitigate concerns from both units that the other is doing its job.

Establishing Operating Hours

The operational hours will also dictate, to some degree, the number of personnel required to effectively manage an RTCC. Some departments may choose to operate an RTCC 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This level of operation requires about 12 full-time RTCC personnel to accommodate shift changes, peak crime and activity times, vacation and sick leave, etc. Two to three personnel are on-duty during a typical night, and that number may drop to one or two in the early morning. While these are best-practice estimates, the workload for a given jurisdiction will dictate, to some degree, how the RTCC provides coverage.

Other departments may choose to operate their RTCCs primarily during peak crime times, during special or large-scale public events, or as needed. Further, some agencies may decide to use existing personnel to staff these special events. These decisions will obviously impact the number of personnel who are required to remain operational and the cost of maintaining RTCC operations.

Physical and Organizational Location (Chain of Command)

Establishing a clearly defined chain of command for the RTCC is another important decision for an agency. Given the time-sensitive nature of the work in an RTCC (responding to priority 1 calls, addressing active crimes in progress, and working substantial cases as quickly as possible), it may make sense that the primary law enforcement executive have routine contact with the RTCC.

Depending on the size of the agency and on access and availability of physical space, some departments may prefer to physically house an RTCC with a crime analysis division. In some agencies, an RTCC may be set up in a location that is physically separated and distant (on different floors) from the CAD. This decision may be based in part on space availability.

However, functional separation also limits the extent to which CAD analysts can engage in activities that are directed to the RTCC and limits the extent to which RTCC sworn personnel might learn about how crime analysis could assist with and impact the mission. While recognizing that the missions of an RTCC and a CAD are indeed different, some redundant skill sets and some common activities and practices might be enhanced by having RTCC sworn personnel in physical proximity to crime analysts. The general recommendation is to consider where the RTCC may be best positioned within your particular agency to maximize its effectiveness, either independently or in conjunction with a crime analysis unit.

Integrating External Agencies in an RTCC

Some departments may consider establishing an RTCC with partner agencies (e.g., departments of transportation, fire and emergency medical systems, private businesses). Ideally, these decisions should be made at an earlier stage but certainly can evolve as the RTCC evolves and capabilities and functions are added. A benefit in integration allows for crime problems to be reviewed and engaged in holistically.