

Population: 430,000 residents and 3 million visitors annually

Police Department workforce: 817 sworn officers (authorized); 162 civilians

Synopsis

The Virginia Beach, Virginia Police Department (VBPD) is notable among the public safety organizations we interviewed. It has replaced traditional learning-by-the-seat-of-your-pants with programs that prepare officers for promotion and ease them into supervisory roles through job shadowing, field training, and coaching. Officers chosen to serve on a strategic-issue team get the opportunity to analyze a department challenge, gather input from their peers, and present recommended solutions to the chief. Employees at all levels learn the basic elements of the West Point Leadership Course, which gives everyone a common language and makes leadership a frequent topic of conversation. The department uses surveys to track its organizational climate and 360 feedback to monitor the performance of command staff. While many police departments send top candidates to an outside academy for leadership development, Virginia Beach has used two externally funded grants to create a culture of leadership throughout its ranks.

Challenges

■ **Retirements.** The City of Virginia Beach was incorporated in 1963 through a merger of two communities: the town of Virginia Beach and Princess Anne County. In the 1970s and early 1980s, as the population grew, the police department also expanded. The fact that so many new officers were hired within that period explains why so many are now eligible to retire. Of the 114 people with the rank of sergeant (equivalent to first-line supervisor) or above, 36 (32 percent) are already retirement eligible; 45 (39 percent) will be by 2007.

Approach

Our research found few examples of exemplary approaches to building the leadership pipeline in local fire and police departments. (See sidebar, “What Makes Public Safety Different?”) Yet the Virginia Beach Police Department (VBPD) has implemented a remarkable array of practices including courses for new supervisors, managers and leaders; coaching; team assignments; 360-degree feedback and an organizational survey. Elsewhere in city government, these might not seem remarkable. In law enforcement, they are.

How did Virginia Beach become an innovator among police departments in developing the next generation of leaders?

It began in 1999 as an effort to create ownership within the department by creating strategic-issue teams. Since then, aided by two grants from Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), it has mushroomed into a full complement of leadership-building initiatives that penetrate every level

of the department. Some even reach outside to bring in community members and neighboring law enforcement agencies. As part of the second grant, VBPD has hired a team from George Washington University (GWU) to evaluate those initiatives. Through a process known as “appreciative inquiry,” GWU’s approach combines organizational development with assessment, community input with internal self-scrutiny.

First Steps

When Chief A. M. Jacocks, Jr. was promoted from Deputy Chief in 1999, he wanted the department to focus on basic issues like its values, mission, and ethics. To do so, he created a team of 16 people drawn from a cross-section of the workforce: from very junior to very senior officers as well as civilian employees. Their assignment was to come up with a mission statement and a vision for the VBPD. “Our department has always had a mission,” he explains. “But our core values were all over the board. Nobody could tell us what they were.”

The Chief spoke with the team about his own aspirations for the department, but he left it up to them to build the platform. To do so, they gathered input from throughout the department by conducting focus groups. Then they drafted the mission and vision statements and delivered them to the chief, who circulated the documents to the department for comment. With minor wordsmithing, the mission and vision developed by the first strategic-issue team was adopted. Today, it stands as the department’s foundation.

Since then, similar teams have been created to tackle other topics. In fact, at any given time, about 10-15 percent of the department’s workforce is serving on a strategic issue team. Regardless of the assignment—topics have included increasing diversity through recruitment, creating an incident command system as part of Homeland Security, and designing some of the department’s new leadership courses — the team’s assignment is to gather information and input from within the department and then deliver its recommendations. “It gives them ownership of whatever product they end up with,” explains Jacocks. And it creates internal champions when the team’s recommendations are carried out.

Teams aren’t part of any formal approach to leadership development. Yet serving on a successful team lets employees stretch beyond their normal sphere of influence to grapple with larger, department-wide issues. It gives them the chance to demonstrate their capabilities. It also gives them a deeper understanding of the organization and its environment — exactly what many leadership programs try to do.

Team members are appointed by senior command staff. “They’re not selected because we saw their names on a promotional list,” says Jacocks. “They’re chosen because they’re valued members of our organization and are known by other members of our organization.”

Using strategic-issue teams has helped to bring about a larger culture change, explains Deputy Chief Greg Mullen. VBPD has become less of a traditionally run, top-down organization. “We have a chain of command that we can implement when necessary, such as a hostage situation or a riot breaking out. Otherwise, we really try to give people an opportunity to be involved.”

Building Leadership

Since 2002, the VBPD has rolled out a menu of leadership development initiatives that touch many levels of the organization. “We recognized that we weren’t doing a very good job preparing people to move into leadership positions,” explains Mullen. “We weren’t socializing them very well into their new roles.” To address that need and, at the same time, backfill some of the training that current command staff had never received, the department launched several new programs in 2003.

■ **West Point Leadership Course** The VBPD brought the West Point Military Academy’s leadership course to Virginia Beach but modified it to meet its own needs. The course meets one day per week for sixteen weeks. Participants learn leadership theory and then apply it to law enforcement case studies. Initially, the course was targeted for current sergeants and lieutenants, most of whom had been promoted into those positions without any formal preparation. In the future, the course will be opened up to master police officers to prepare them for advancement opportunities. To date, four cohorts—totaling 64 command staff members—have completed the course. The department also created a shorter in-service training in which officers of any level can learn some of the basic leadership theory taught in the West Point course.

■ **Sergeants’ Prep Course.** As VBPD was rejiggering the West Point Leadership Course, “we started asking ourselves, what are we doing to help people move from officer rank to supervisor?” says Mullen. “That’s the most difficult career transition for most people.”

So, as has become the norm in VBPD’s new culture, the department put together a small group of lieutenants, sergeants, captains and one deputy chief. Some had just become supervisors; others had been promoted years ago. Participants were asked: What didn’t you have or know when you made sergeant, what would have made you more effective sooner?

Based on this feedback, the department developed a Sergeants’ Prep Course. The top 30 candidates who are eligible for that promotion are invited to attend the initial 40 hours of classroom training followed by 40 hours shadowing a tenured sergeant. Once they’re promoted, they spend 80 hours with a field training sergeant before setting out on their own.

■ **Leadership Practices Inventory.** With new training programs in place, the department looked for ways to make development continuous — for both individual and the organization. All 64 graduates of the West Point Leadership Course have completed a 360-degree assessment, which will be repeated annually. In the future, everyone at the sergeant-level and above will do a 360.

■ **Campbell Organizational Survey.** The 360-degree process enables command staff to learn how they’re viewed by others. To learn how employees view the organization, VBPD launched a self-assessment using the Campbell Organizational Survey (COS). This standardized instrument measures employees’ attitudes and feelings about 17 aspects of the workplace, including work conditions, stress, the work itself, job security, coworkers, supervisor, training, promotion, communication, planning, pay, and benefits. The results, which highlight strengths and areas for improvement, can be aggregated to reflect the whole organization or segmented for specific units.

Most of the organizations that have used the survey and serve as a comparison group are from the private sector. Only a handful are law enforcement agencies. That was good, in the department’s view. “We know that private sector organizations do things differently and can offer rewards and other incentives we can’t,” Mullen says. “But if our organization can measure up, then we’ll know we have something.”

In fact, on every dimension but pay and benefits, the VBPD scored above the mid-point for the comparison group of organizations. It was a promising start that the Department hopes to improve upon. To get there, the chief assigned members of the command staff to create four new teams, each focused on one area that the department considered important for improvement: leadership, quality, planning, and employee development and support. The teams are conducting focus groups to identify specific problem areas and ideas for how the department can improve. Eventually, at least some of those they recommend will be implemented. Then in 2005, the COS will be repeated to get another reading on employees’ view of their organization and to compare the new results with the early ones.

Setting priorities to be accomplished within a one-year time frame has advantages, says Mullen. “When you do strategic planning, it takes a long time to see results. By identifying things that could be completed in 12 months, we can show that we’re accomplishing things.”

■ **Coaching.** It’s one thing to solicit feedback about individual leaders or about the organization overall. It’s quite another for leaders to do something with that data. To improve the chances of that happening, VBPD partnered with George Mason University to develop a Leadership Coaching Certificate Program. Fifteen members of the command staff — either volunteers or those nominated by their superiors — have enrolled in the course. The

curriculum focuses on organizational leadership and development. The class carries four master's-level credits and meets for two days every six weeks, with additional assignments online. It also includes four hours of work with an executive coach to develop coaching skills. By the end of the course, participants will be trained to help VBPD supervisory employees interpret their 360-degree feedback results and create their own development plan. Initially, coaches will work with employees recently promoted to supervisory positions. "Having a coach provides someone they can talk to and ask questions of, without fear of sounding like a dummy," explains Mullen. With the addition of coaches, he hopes the learning curve for new sergeants will drop from 12 months down to six.

- **Leadership Speaker Series.** The department created a speaker series to bring in leadership experts from outside the department six times per year. "That gives us an external perspective, instead of just looking internally," says Mullen. The audience is also mixed: In addition to its own supervisors and field training officers, Virginia Beach invites other local police departments to attend. Topics range from "soft" areas such as emotional survival in law enforcement and developing productive relationships to more technical subjects such as employee discipline and managing workplace bias and harassment.
- **Management Skills Course.** In 2005, the department is launching a new, six-day Management Skills course that will teach practical skills and knowledge in four areas: finance (How does the city's budget process work? What's the difference between a capital expenditure and an operating cost?); customer service; employee development and support (mediation skills, employee assistance programs) and internal processes (for example, using department's database for analysis and report-generation). The West Point Leadership Course introduces people to theories they can apply to challenges they're facing. The Management Skills course gives them the wherewithal to be able to implement an action plan.

Putting It All Together

Instead of just piling on new leadership programs, the department also thinks about how these efforts all fit together. "Historically, we put this or that program together, but we never connected the dots," says Mullen. But if the goal is to make everyone in the department a leader, the elements need to be part of the whole. To accomplish that, VBPD has made the West Point Leadership Course the nucleus for leadership development at all levels. The basic models and language have been incorporated into other courses — from the academy for new recruits to in-service training for other officers. Creating a common core that cuts across the department's training is "a big change," says Mullen.

Impacts

The impact of these programs shows up in lots of small ways, says Mullen. "What jumps out for me is the commonality of language people now use," based on their exposure to the West Point leadership theory. It shows up, too, in the number of supervisors he's noticed putting that theory into practice—creating development plans for subordinates who are having performance problems, or managing equity issues in a manner that won't fan the flames of employee misperceptions. Not only have leaders learned new skills, he adds, "I see leaders starting to impart that knowledge to others."

These are encouraging signs, but anecdotal. To generate more rigorous data, VBPD engaged a team from George Washington University to evaluate its COPS-funded programs. GWU's methodology is not the usual survey-and-numbers-crunching, although number-crunching is one component. Rather, GWU is conducting a three-step process built on a radical premise: that the measures of success used in the evaluation shouldn't be imposed by an external entity, such as a university evaluation team. Rather, they should be grounded in the organization being evaluated and its environment. That is why it is called "participatory evaluation."

"Anybody could have come in and looked at our numbers," says Mullen. "We felt we'd get more benefit out of this type of evaluation."

Cost

In 2002, the Department was awarded an \$118,000, "Creating a Culture of Integrity" grant from COPS. This funding enabled VBPD to expand its leadership development program by adding the Campbell Organizational Survey, the Leadership Speaker Series, and the Leadership Practices Inventory. The grant also funded initial research for an Early Intervention Program that identifies employees with performance problems and provide immediate support and development.

In 2003, a team of department members applied for a larger, more competitive COPS grant called "Enhancing a Culture of Integrity." Four US cities were chosen: Boston, San Diego, Sacramento, and Virginia Beach. The \$442,900 grant is enabling VBPD to continue or expand existing programs and introduce new ones, such as the coaching program, the management skills course, the early intervention program, and the program evaluation.

How much will it cost to continue the new training programs? VBPD currently spends about \$3,000 annually on its 360-degree feedback process. The only cost for the new courses is in instructors' time.

Evaluation

Phase I of the process brought together 75 of the VBPD's internal and external stakeholders for a day-long Community Summit on November, 12, 2004. Through a process known as "Appreciative Inquiry" (see sidebar on page 44, "What

Is Appreciative Inquiry?”), the assembled group would, by the end of the day, create a model for the ideal police department.

Deputy Chief Mullen admits he felt nervous as a Noah’s Ark of Virginia Beach residents and police officers streamed into the department’s training center for the day-long Summit. Would the 26 police officers and 49 community members actually participate in the exercises the facilitators had planned? Or would their eyes glaze over like deer caught in the headlights?

A cross-section of city residents and police officers had been scrambled into diverse groups and assigned to sit together at one of 12 tables. A police captain might find a high school teacher to his right and a minister to his left and, across the table, a rookie cop and a public defender. Together, each table would have to discuss their ideas about what an ideal police department would look like. Then they would have to take out their colored markers and draw a picture of it, not using any words. It was the drawing part that had him worried.

“People really got into it,” says Mullen, still sounding surprised. Each table presented its drawing to the large group and described the values and attributes that it embodied, using single words or short phrases. After lunch, each person was asked to select a single value that was most important to achieving the ideal police department, in their view, and to write that value on a “sticky.” Then they were set free to mill around the room in search of others who had chosen the same value or one close to it.

It could have been mayhem. But, much as the facilitators had predicted, the field soon narrowed to six themes or clusters of values: more community involvement, better pay and benefits, more minority recruitment and retention, diversity, building community trust, and greater accountability. Finally, the new groups that had formed around each theme were asked to come up with four or five priorities. These were specific tactics VBPB could initiate to move closer toward each value. To become a more diverse police force, for example, the group suggested not only sending recruiters to more job fairs but also bringing the local NAACP president with them to talk with potential recruits.

Phase II (April-May 2005) brought a smaller version of the Community Summit back to the table. Out of the original 75 participants, 15 stakeholders—both external and internal—were chosen, based on their potential impact on the department. They reviewed the information generated in Phase I and weighed which priorities were most feasible and most important for the department to act on. From this distillation process came the yardsticks for program evaluation in Phase III.

Phase III (September 2005). The GWU consultants will perform a more typical program evaluation, although it will combine qualitative data (interview and focus group) and quantitative. By mining data that the department has

already collected as part of its normal tracking process, the evaluation team will produce a snapshot of where the VBPB is today. Have there been any changes in the number of citizen complaints? Or the number of internal inquiries that were initiated to investigate personnel matters? What’s happened to people who served on a strategic-issue team? Have they been promoted or transferred to a specialty assignment?

Then the evaluators will line up that snapshot against the ideal police department envisioned at the Community Summit and do a gap analysis: What impact have the new programs had? In which areas has the department made progress? Where’s it falling short? Chief Jacocks plans to invite the entire Community Summit back to hear this final report.

But that may not be the last invitation they receive from the Police Department. “The Summit had a lot of unintended consequences,” says Mullen, “and they were all good.” Some community participants arrived poised for battle, they admitted later. But many softened as the day wore on. “I’ve never had the chance to sit down and talk with a police officer,” said one community member. Remarked an officer, “That was the first time I’d heard things from the NAACP president’s perspective.”

In fact, many asked if there would be another Summit. That gave Mullen an idea for the coming year. Rather than continuing to bring in speakers for the Leadership Lecture Series, why not hold more of these summits, focusing on specific community issues?

When the VBPB selected GWU as its program evaluator for the large COPS grant, “we were taking a leap of faith,” Mullen admits. “I can’t find you anybody who’s done anything like this before.”

The traditional approach is to assess a program against its original goals, using external experts, wielding “objective” standards. But GWU’s participatory evaluation process serves an additional purpose. It is itself an organizational development intervention. It aims not only to assess the COPS grant’s impact but, perhaps more importantly, to help the department recognize its organizational strengths as well as shortcomings. Then it is designed to help the organization move closer to the ideal model of a police department that internal and external stakeholders have defined together.

Next Steps

- By the end of the grant period (August 2006), VBPB will produce a technical manual describing the programs it initiated through the grant and the lessons learned. Copies will be available through COPS.
- VBPB is considering hiring a consultant to develop a 360-degree feedback tool that would more closely reflect the department’s culture and core competencies.

What Is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry is a way of thinking, seeing, and acting for powerful, purposeful change in organizations. Appreciative Inquiry works on the assumption that whatever you want more of, already exists in all organizations. While traditional problem-solving processes separate and dissect pieces of a system, Appreciative Inquiry generates images that affirm the forces that give life and energy

to a system. David Cooperrider, Suresh Srivastva, Frank Barrett, John Carter and others developed the theory at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio in the 1970s.

This table illustrates the differences between the traditional diagnostic model used in Organization Development and the Appreciative Inquiry model.

TRADITIONAL OD PROCESS	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
Define the problem	Search for solutions that already exist
Fix what's broken	Amplify what is working
Focus on decay	Focus on life giving forces
What problems are you having?	What is working well around here?

Appreciative Inquiry is a complex philosophy that engages the entire system in an inquiry about what works. The inquiry discovers data that is then analyzed for common themes. The group articulates the themes and dreams of "what could be" and "what will be." What will be is the future envisioned through an analysis of the past.

The entire system maintains the best of the past by discovering what it is and starching it into future possibilities. This differs from other visioning work because the envisioned future is grounded in the reality of the actual past.

Resources:

The Appreciative Inquiry Commons, Case Western Reserve University, is the Internet homeland of AI. The site offers both theoretical papers and practical applications of AI, including case studies and tools. ai.cwru.edu/

Joe Hall and Sue Hammond. "What Is Appreciative Inquiry?" For the complete article from which the above segment is reprinted (with permission), go to lib1.store.vip.sc5.yahoo.com/lib/thinbook/whatisai.pdf

Sue Annis Hammond (1998) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing.