

III - OVERVIEW

The Dallas Police Department is an organization that has lost its way. Over the years an organization that took pride in itself as one of the leading police agencies in the nation has lost its commitment to excellence. Rather than working with the city manager and the city council to establish clear goals and high expectations for policing, no clear direction for the department has been established and communicated to department employees and to the Dallas community. Because no clearly defined and articulated direction has been established, the department has been whipsawed as it seeks to respond to “flavor of the month” programmatic initiatives and individual service requests. Moreover, because the department lacks an external focus and direction, employees have turned their direction inward. Concerns – most of them legitimate – about internal management, operational practices and staffing levels dominate the minds of employees to the exclusion, in many cases, of concerns about how best to serve the citizens of Dallas. This preoccupation with internal matters has not only caused employee morale to plummet but, even worse, has created an environment in which many employees no longer set high expectations for themselves. Instead of striving to regain the excellence it once achieved, many employees are willing to settle for second best – both in terms of their own performance and in terms of the level of service they provide the citizens of Dallas.

The internal malaise that characterizes the police department contributes to a service delivery system that is deeply flawed. Put simply, the Dallas Police Department does not provide a high level of service to Dallas citizens. The department’s response time to emergency calls-for-service is the second lowest among the nine benchmark police departments providing information for this study. (The department is the third lowest in terms of responding to non-emergency calls.) In addition, the level of crime in Dallas is high. Violent crimes (homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) per thousand population are higher in Dallas than in all but one of the benchmark cities and the department has a higher rate of non-violent crimes (burglary, larceny/theft and vehicle theft) than any of the benchmark cities. Only in its ability to solve crime does the Dallas Police Department compare favorably to the benchmark cities.

Moreover, in the focus groups and “drop in” sessions conducted with over 450 citizens throughout this engagement, participants were animate and passionate in expressing their displeasure with the department’s performance. It is important to note, however, that these perspectives are not shared by the Dallas citizenry as a whole. In a survey of a representative sample of Dallas citizens, more than three-fourths (78.1 percent) indicate that they are satisfied with the overall performance of the police department and more than four out of five citizens (82.2 percent) “agree” or “strongly agree” that Dallas is a safe community.

These findings suggest that the Dallas Police Department is at a cross-roads. Despite extremely poor morale, managerial listlessness and the lack of clear direction and priorities, the department has not lost the confidence of the Dallas community as a whole. The passion exhibited by participants in focus groups and drop-in sessions, however, suggest that this situation is by no means stable. Moreover, while service levels suffer, due to the efforts of individual, dedicated employees the internal issues that plague the department have not yet reached a tipping point in which internal dysfunction causes services to be irreconcilably harmed. If current trends continue, however, the efforts of individual employees may no longer be sufficient to prevent the organizational

and management dysfunction within the department from overwhelming individual efforts to provide high quality services to Dallas citizens. Indeed, if immediate and forceful action is not taken, the current malaise that infects the organization runs the risk of metastasizing and becoming so virulent that even draconian measures to improve the organization may not be successful. Indeed, at present, an undercurrent of anger and resentment exists within the department that, if not addressed or redirected, has the potential to become incendiary.

Immediate and forceful action must be combined with an ongoing long-term commitment to improvement if the department is to successfully reverse the negative trends that characterize its current management and operations and, in time, recapture its former excellence. Over the long term the following steps should be taken to strengthen the department's performance:

- Work with city management and the City Council to develop quantifiable goals reflecting citizen service priorities that are aggressive yet obtainable within the resources available to support police operations
- Develop strategic and operational plans to achieve these goals in the most efficient and effective manner possible
- Establish systems to hold individuals and groups within the department accountable for achieving desired goals while also providing managers and supervisors with the authority and resources needed to be successful
- Ensure the overall organizational structure of the police department, as well as the organization of individual units, facilitates efforts to achieve desired goals
- Establish a commitment to employing high quality personnel and to expecting high performance from staff each and every day
- Provide ongoing training to build needed skills and expertise among staff at all levels within the police department
- Develop approaches to building the management and leadership capacity needed to address the department's future needs
- Focus management and supervisory attention on maximizing the skills of all department employees
- Maintain an unrelenting focus on using resources as efficiently and effectively as possible to achieve desired goals while also ensuring sufficient resources are available to achieve these goals
- Correct management and operational practices that divert attention from achieving goals while also ensuring the department is appropriately responsive to the needs of individual citizens
- Eliminate barriers to efficient and effective operations

- Revamp policies and procedures to reflect the police department's management and operational values
- Invest in the management systems and practices needed to support effective operations on an ongoing basis

Fully implementing these steps will require an ongoing commitment and patience – significant progress on some of these actions will likely not be achieved for at least three years. At the same time, however, department leaders and managers must also be impatient for change. The department must change course and change course immediately if the current problems that plague the department and threaten its long-term health are to be addressed. In the immediate term, the department should:

- Strengthen day-to-day supervision and management
- Communicate high expectations for employee performance and provide consequences to employees who do not meet these expectations
- Take immediate action to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness and, in so doing, communicate to decision-makers that any additional resources provided to the department will be used effectively
- Increase the transparency of decisions relating to promotion and transfers to undercut perceptions that these processes are flawed and unfair
- Make strategic investments in the tools, systems and infrastructure that will have the greatest short-term impact on department performance

Implementation efforts are doomed to failure, however, without strong and steadfast leadership within the department and unless a strong working relationship is established between the department, city management and the City Council. A strong working relationship is essential to making tough decisions about service priorities, what quantifiable goals can be achieved with available resources, and how resources should be allocated among competing needs. In addition, the City Council, the department and city management must work together to ensure that the department is able to maintain its focus on achieving agreed upon goals while also maintaining the ability to be responsive to emerging needs. Finally, investments will be needed to implement some of these recommendations. In exchange for receiving this funding the department must show that these investments will yield a quantifiable return in terms of improved services and performance.