



New Orleans, Louisiana

Criminal Case Management Assessment

Report

February 2017

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As part of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Violence Reduction Network (VRN), an assessment of the New Orleans criminal case management was performed at the request of New Orleans VRN. The purpose of this effort is to assist the New Orleans Police Department's (NOPD) by reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of their current Detective function, operations, case management approach and leadership structure. A specific focus area for this assistance was evaluation of the department's current use of their Criminal Case Management System (CCMS) by case detectives and detective supervisors

At the request of New Orleans VRN and at BJA's direction, CNA engaged a subject-matter expert (SME) to perform this assessment—Garrett Zimmon, a consultant who works with the US Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program. On December 5-9, 2016 subject matter expert Garrett Zimmon traveled to New Orleans, to conduct an on-site visit to meet with personnel from the NOPD. During the four-day visit, Mr. Zimmon conducted interviews with Chief of Operations Paul Noel, District Commander Nicholas Gernon, and Director of Analytics Benjamin Horwitz. He also conducted interviews with detective supervisors (lieutenants and sergeants), and property and crimes-against-persons detectives, from four of the eight Field Operations Districts of the NOPD. The assessment also involved reviews of pertinent sections of the NOPD Manual, pertinent Field Operations Bureau and Investigation & Support Bureau policy documents, and the NOPD Consent Decree. Mr. Zimmon also participated in a hands-on overview of the CCMS, the Electronic Police Reporting (EPR) and the NOPD Report Log (REPO5) systems, and attended a NOPD Management Analytics for eXcellence (MAX) meeting (formerly ComStat).

It is clear that NOPD has a genuine commitment to improving investigative practices and case management activities. During the visit, based on discussion with and direction by Chief Noel, the focus of the assessment was determined to be the use of the CCMS by the District Investigative Units (DIU). Chief Noel's concern was how the CCMS is being used by detective personnel and supervisors; and he hoped the assessment would discover information that would be useful in ensuring the CCMS meets the needs and expectations of the detectives, supervisors and department managers.

Chief Noel outlined some broad priority areas (system and workload) that he wanted the assessment to address. These include the use (or resistance to use) of the CCMS by supervisors and detectives, how detective supervisors use the CCMS to assign and manage cases, issues field personnel

have with the CCMS, and suggestions on how the CCMS can be improved (system issues). Chief Noel is also interested in ways to prioritize criminal investigations (workload issue) with the goal of reducing violent crime.

Observations, Findings, and Recommendations

As a result of the on-site assessment, observations, findings, and recommendations for NOPD are offered for consideration. This section presents the SMEs' observations about the CCMS use in NOPD, followed by major findings of the assessment, and closes with three key recommendations.

Observations Regarding CCMS

The CCMS is an off-the-shelf proprietary computer program that was designed to help detectives manage and document criminal investigations, and function as an oversight and informational tool for supervisors and managers. The CCMS was rolled out in 2010 and is still in use today. Training was provided to detectives and detective supervisors at the time of the CCMS rollout. Since it is a proprietary product, there is currently little data sharing with other NOPD systems other than the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.

- Note: The NOPD is in the process of obtaining an updated version of the CCMS software. The software will be donated to the NOPD. Thus, it is not software designed for the exact needs of the NOPD or based on requirements provided to the company. As of the time of this assessment, it is expected the software will be provided to the NOPD within the first six months of 2017. The NOPD has no current information on the capabilities of the newer version.

The CCMS is updated daily by each District through transition of item numbers (case numbers) and signal numbers (crime codes) for that District from a Report Log (REPO5). The way this process occurs differs by District. In some Districts, this process is led by the supervisors, in some by a member of the DIU, and in some by the detectives. In some instances, when detectives respond to the scene of a crime and conduct an investigation, they directly open the case in the CCMS. Once the item and signal numbers are in the CCMS, they can be sorted by supervisor or crime.

When a case item number is opened in the CCMS, the CAD system populates the date, the Item Number (assigned report number), and the Signal Number (crime code). The detective must go to the Electronic Police Report (EPR) system and enter the Item Number to view the police report. The EPR does not populate the CCMS with victim or crime information. The detective must manually input that

information into the CCMS for each case. The CCMS has a section that serves as a log of investigative steps and activities. Detectives must type a synopsis of the crime and the information from the EPR report into the log. That log section also allows detectives to document ongoing follow-up, investigative steps, and any actions taken by the detective during the investigation. This information is available to other detectives, supervisors, and managers, and is used to complete a supplemental report(s) in the EPR as part of the official documents for the Item Number.

The NOPD Manual does not have specific guidelines on the prioritization of most criminal investigations. However, the Manual does cover the investigation of some specialized crimes, auto theft, and lost property. The guidelines that are specific to DIUs are found in Operations Bureau Policy #22 dated February 22, 2010. This policy lists four case classifications for Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) offenses. They are as follows:

- A-Case: Cases involving an arrest.
- B-Case: Cases involving a known or named suspect.
- C-Case: Cases with follow-up potential.
- D-Case: Cases with no follow-up potential or substantive evidence.

Detectives are allowed 14 days to complete an assigned case investigation. An extension of 30 days can be granted by the DIU Commander.

Commanders from the Districts are held accountable at the MAX meetings for crime trends and patterns, progress of case investigations, and overall management of the Districts. DIU supervisors monitor cases and trends, as well as the completion of crime investigations. Case prioritization for crimes against person is pretty straightforward, particularly in the case of crimes of violence. However, changes to case prioritization for property crimes may be able to reduce workload, allowing more thorough investigations for solvable crimes and possibly freeing up additional resources so the District can increase the focus on violent crime.

Chief Noel emphasized this issue at the December 7, 2016 MAX meeting at Police Headquarters. When one District Commander was discussing crime patterns and investigations, Chief Noel stated that he wanted that District to place its emphasis and priority on addressing violent crime.

Findings

Case Assignment: Each District has two sergeants assigned to the DIU: one for property crimes and one for other crimes against persons. The manner in which each District assigns cases to

detectives in the CCMS reflects the workload and geography of that District. Some Districts assign crimes by geographic area, others assign detectives to specific types of crime. Districts also vary in how they assign detectives to new cases. In some Districts that assign detectives to specific crimes, supervisors still review the cases and assign the cases to the detective. In other Districts the detectives self-assign cases. In all Districts it is a priority to respond to the scene of crimes against person, with an emphasis on violent or potentially violent crimes. In those cases, depending on the circumstances, the responding detective may be assigned the case or that individual might document his/her investigative actions, so the information is available to another detective who is ultimately assigned the case.

- Note: In one District, the new District Commander learned that when the District's detectives responded to a crime scene they were using email (rather than the CCMS "log") to notify other detectives and supervisors of the investigative actions taken. Such communication limits that information to only the parties on the email. It also can cause discovery issues in court and limits the value of the CCMS as a supervisory and informational tool. That situation has been corrected.

Training and Documentation for CCMS: All four Districts use the CCMS. However, there does not appear to have been any formal training on the system since the original rollout in 2010 and there is no manual or users guide for the system. New detectives learn about the use of the CCMS by on-the-job use or through orientation by current detective personnel. As a result, if the person who teaches the new detective likes and uses the CCMS, the new detective tends to have a more positive view of the use and capabilities of the CCMS. Conversely, if the "training" detective does not like or understand the CCMS, the new detective tends to have a less positive view of the usefulness of the CCMS.

The same holds true for the use of the system by supervisors. How the use of the system varies from supervisor to supervisor and depends on the management and leadership style of the supervisor. Some supervisors are very involved with the use of the CCMS, while other supervisors think the use of the CCMS was very time consuming and a duplication of effort.

- Note: Most of the detectives interviewed during the site visit were assigned to property crimes. Their workload of cases is greater than crimes-against-persons crime detectives and they were therefore more vocal regarding the time that is consumed entering the EPR

information into the CCMS and the lack of ability to conduct relationship searches (such as a property searches).

Personnel Awareness of Policy and Requirements: All the detectives interviewed were aware that the use of the CCMS was mandatory. All were also aware of the need for up-to-date information for supervisors and managers during the MAX meetings. All personnel interviewed were also acutely aware of the mandates of and compliance with the NOPD Consent Decree, some of which have added additional workload to detectives.

Resource Constraints: The staffing level in NOPD is down almost 30 percent from previous years. The reasons are many, some are specific to the internal and external challenges being addressed by the NOPD, others relate to the current decline in some police agencies across the United States in the number of applicants for police positions. Interlocutors indicated that the number of detectives assigned to the District DIU's are also down about 30 percent. This comes at a time where the NOPD is working under a Consent Decree and has moved to the MAX, a holistic, data-driven approach to police management.

Benefits and Challenges of CCMS: Overall, DIU detectives and supervisors understood the need for the CCMS. As part of the assessment, those interviewed were asked what could be changed in the CCMS that would help free up more time and better assist in workload management. Below is a summary of the comments made during these interviews:

Comments on value of CCMS

- The CCMS is a database that allows them to keep track of their assigned cases.
- The "log" section allows them to make notes and document investigative steps in an electronic folder.
- Detectives or others who received information on a case can leave a note in the log.
- In those cases where a detective responds the initial crime scene and documents his/her investigative actions in the CCMS case log, it was very useful to the case detective and prevented duplication of effort.
- The CCMS does allow searches by the name of the victim or suspect.

Comments on changes to CCMS

- The most common issue raised was the redundancy of the CCMS, particularly the task of hand-entering the same information that is already in the EPR report. For property crime detectives, this task alone was reported to take up the first half of the day.
- When detectives leave a victim or witness a message, or some other step that requires a response back to the detective, there is no way to set a follow-up reminder date (or alert) in the CCMS. The detective must keep a separate reminder log.
- When a new case is assigned by a supervisor in the CCMS system, it goes into the detective's list of cases by the date and time of the original item number. Detectives commented that it would be helpful to also receive an automated notification of the new case.
- The search function for property is not useful. To be a practical function, the search function requires access to the ERP report property database. This would save time and help detectives investigate crime trends and patterns, and create a valuable tool for assisting criminal investigations.
- There were numerous other suggestions that were made by only one detective/supervisor that could have application on a broader scale.

Need for Personnel Input: On December 7, 2016, as part of the on-site assessment visit, a meeting was held in the office of Director Horwitz. As the Director of Analytics, he is the technical person most involved with the upgrade of the CCMS system, as well as being the most knowledgeable about the capabilities of the current system. Director Horwitz indicated that he thought there could be some modifications to the current CCMS. The discussion included conversation about possibility holding a focus group of detective personnel to get their insight into issues with the CCMS and develop a priority list of things they would like modified in the CCMS. Horwitz agreed to this plan and will attend the focus group so that he can understand the context of issues raised.

While the expected rollout of the upgraded version of the CCMS is the first half of 2017, it is a donated system that is currently being developed for another department and there is no clear delivery date. As a result, Horwitz has little insight into the new system or its capabilities. The focus group recommendations would be valuable whether the old CCMS stays in place for a longer time or when working with the developer on the rollout of the new system.

Inconsistent Standards for Follow-up: Based upon the interviews and observations, one critical issue concerns supervisor's definitions of what constitutes the need for follow-up for potential or substantive evidence. Some supervisors define that term very broadly, thereby possibly including cases that may not need additional follow-up.

Prioritization of Cases: All detectives and supervisors who were interviewed had a very high desire to provide service to all victims of crime in New Orleans. It is clearly a culture that is imbued and highly valued in the organization. There is a concern that citizens will call the Compliance Bureau to complain when they believe a detective is not doing enough to solve their case. Detectives feel such calls will result in a complaint. This creates a situation where there are fewer detectives in DIU, yet at the same time, a resistance to lower the priority of cases out of fear of criticism. This could be a perceived concern or a concern based on actual experiences, yet it is nonetheless a perception that should be taken into consideration when looking at prioritizing criminal cases.

Recommendations

- **CCMS Policy:** NOPD should develop a uniform policy for the use of the CCMS. The policy should be flexible enough to meet the staffing configuration of the various Districts, yet mandate uniform use of the CCMS, and provide specific direction on the use of the CCMS to document investigative steps and actions.
- **User Guide:** NOPD should develop a user guide for the CCMS and provide training to all detectives and detective supervisors on the use of CCMS system and its capabilities.
 - Note: The NOPD has a lot of training that is mandated by the Consent Decree so training time is a precious commodity. However, the roll out of the new CCMS provides a window of opportunity for introductory training. It is important that all DIU detectives and supervisors are properly trained and socialized in the use and capabilities of the CCMS.
- **Focus Group:** NOPD should conduct a focus group comprised of detectives from the Districts. The goal of this effort would be to identify issues of concern and recommendations regarding the CCMS from the actual users of the system. The deliverable from the focus group will be a prioritized list of recommendations regarding both the CCMS and the feedback on the prioritization of criminal investigations.

- It is recommended that this process be conducted by Mr. Zimmon, as the SME for this assessment. An independent facilitator will allow a more open discussion and add credibility to the process.
- Chief Noel and Commander Gernon were briefed on this recommendation. Chief Noel agreed with strategy and is supportive of the process.

Conclusion

This assessment was conducted at the request of Chief Noel. He was very interested in the issues raised from the field and is committed to supporting this technical assistance project. He was briefed on the findings from the site visit and concurs with the recommendation for conducting a focus group, as well as the next steps identified below.

As with any assessment, it took time for the detectives and supervisors to become comfortable with the questions and the purpose of the assessment. However, they did openly participate and it was clear they were forthcoming in their responses. While the assessment occurred in only four of the eight Districts, those Districts represented different communities in New Orleans. The comments were also consistent across the Districts, thereby adding credence to the issues that were identified during the site visit.

There is a lot going on at the NOPD. They are in the midst of complying with an extensive and demanding Consent Decree, and are committed to a transparent, holistic, data-driven approach to police management. All this comes at a time when the size of the agency has decreased by about 30 percent. To be effective, detectives need to work smarter and take advantage of the CCMS to manage their cases. For the CCMS to be effective, it is important that management hears from the working level about issues and suggestions to improve the CCMS and case prioritization.

Next Steps

If approved, the department will conduct a focus group of at least 16 detectives from the DIUs in all eight Districts. The purpose is to obtain recommendations for improving the utility of the CCMS. That process will offer an opportunity for the group to identify and prioritize suggestions for improving the CCMS and the prioritization of the investigation of criminal cases.

Mr. Zimmon will work with Commander Gernon on the development of the focus group process. Mr. Zimmon will develop the initial questionnaires, design the process, and facilitate the focus group. Commander Gernon will assist with the logistics, selection of the date, and obtain a list

of participants from the Districts. Due to all the activities in New Orleans in January/February, the focus group the target date will be in March 2017.

It is estimated that the focus group will require two days in New Orleans (one to finalize all the details and logistics; the other to conduct the focus group).

Upon completion of the focus group, the results will be summarized in a report that the NOPD can use as a basis for making management decisions related to the CCMS and case prioritization.

Consultant Zimmon will also continue to research investigative case prioritization policies to provide NOPD examples of some existing best practices.