

Forming a Cold Case Unit and Unit Expectations

Jason P. Moran 2/13/19





Webinar Speaker

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Webinar Objectives

- > What is a Cold Case and How are They Solved article and webinar (first part of series)
- ➤ Establish the full breadth of what cold cases are Unsolved Murders, Long-term Missing Persons/Unidentified Persons, Undetermined Deaths, and Open Sexual Assault cases (within statutory limitations)
- ➤ This establishes a starting point for selling or defending the need for a Cold Case Unit to decision makers obtaining the political will

Challenges

Simply put there are two (2) hurdles to overcome...

- ➤ (Philosophical) A person that went missing or was murdered many years ago is no less important than the one that goes missing or is murdered today the victim, the family, and our communities deserve resolve.
- ➤ (Technical) How do we justify manpower and resources dedicated to this subfield of law enforcement.

Ancillary Functions

Supporting Department Operations Adds Value

- Complex Death Investigations
- > Forensic (body) Recovery Methods
- ➤ Search for Missing Persons where there is a likelihood the missing is deceased

Forensic Services Unit or Special Investigations Unit or Major Case Unit

Agency Size

This is usually viewed as the number of agency personnel, but can also be viewed as the number of citizens the agency serves (primary vs. secondary jurisdiction)

- Small less than a dozen incidents that fit the definition of cold case in this series
- ➤ Large major city, county, and state police departments that have thousands of these types of cases
- ➤ **Medium** agencies that fall in between small and large



1.) Get Organized

- Establish a need for the unit by forming a comprehensive list of open cold cases
- Decision makers need to visualize the problem

Note: "Cold Case Solvability Matrix" will be the focus of future trainings

urisdiction		
Anytown PD	Open Cases 34 Identified Victims	Number of Victims 45
Anytown PD	Unknown/Body parts/Remains 10	Total Cases 44
Anytown PD AOA – Other Law Enforcement Agency	Open Cases – 23 Identified Victims	Number of Victims 54
Anytown PD AOA – Forest Preserve Police	Unknown/Body parts/Remains 6	Total Cases 27
Anytown PD AOA – Other Law Enforcement Agency (Taskforce)	Open Cases 56 Identified Victims	Number of Victims 68
Anytown PD AOA – Other Law Enforcement Agency (Sex Assaults)	Evidence Collection Kits 9	Total Cases 86
Totals	Unknown/Body Parts/Remains - 23	Open cases 162
Cleared and Opened Cases	Unidentified Victims - 8	

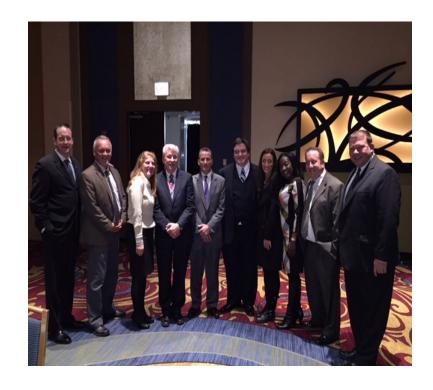
2.) Be Prepared for a Commitment

- Long-term endeavor
- Cold case investigations must be given the time they deserve
- Locating records, evidence, witnesses, and suspects takes time. Travel may be necessary.
- Conducting backgrounds and evidence testing can be tedious

COMMITMEN

3.) Dedicated Staff

- Tasking unit members with investigations or duties unrelated to the cold case mission sets the unit up for failure
- Unnecessary reassignment will cause additional delays and loss of focus



4.) Skill Set, Experience, and Motivation

- Unit members must have a mix of experience and skill levels
- Not a punishment unit and not a retirement unit
- Motivated investigators that have displayed interest in long term, advanced investigations

Staff the unit with a dedicated crime analyst. Database style searching, analytics, statistical reporting, and case management are keys to success.

4.) Skill Set, Experience, and Motivation

Form a Team

- Bring an experienced Evidence Technician into case reviews – they have invaluable experience and can identify clues and/or errors
- ➤ Identify experts that can further your cases (e.g., Forensic Archaeology Team)

Note: "Using Science in Investigations" will be the focus of a future Cold Case webinar in 2019

5.) Units Fit Agency Size

- Large agencies have the resources to staff separate, fulltime units dedicated to unsolved murders, longterm missing/unidentified persons, complex/undetermined deaths, and open sexual assault cases.
- ➤ Medium agencies are better served with a Forensic Services style unit as defined in this series

5.) Units Fit Agency Size

- Small agencies should consider utilizing their homicide task forces in between call outs or consider consolidating under a larger agency with jurisdiction (e.g., county sheriff, state police, regional taskforce)
- > Small agencies should also consider utilizing the services of a consultant for case reviews (e.g., active or retired law enforcement officer with demonstratable experience)





- 1.) Get Organized
- 2.) Be Prepared for a Commitment
- 3.) Dedicated Staff
- 4.) Skill Set, Experience, and Motivation
- 5.) Units Fit Agency Size

Refer to 5 Things document on Forming a Cold Case Unit and Unit Expectations

Unit Expectations

Cold Case Unit success should not be determined through arrests and prosecutions only

Unit success must be viewed by items completed, families helped, and dignity restored

Unit Goal – Bringing the cases to a Contemporary Status

Contemporary Status

- This basically means that all conventional investigative methods have been completed and all contemporary investigative methods have been applied.
- ➤ Even if the cases are not immediately solved they are viable they have a chance at closure due, in part to, all information and evidence being placed in environments where they will continually be compared to other data and other evidence that may further the case.

Contemporary Status

The alternative is to continue to allow these cases to fade away as they collect dust on a shelf where they suffer "a second death".



Pitfalls and Pinnacles

- ➤ Failure to identify unit members that have the proper skill set and experience to contribute to these types of cases working cold cases requires a knowledge base that is a little different than other investigations
- Avoid distractions due to reassignment to other incidents unit supervisor and analyst should keep track of incidents and man hours that keep unit members away from cold cases

Pitfalls and Pinnacles

- Continually monitor databases and scientific testing for new leads, failure to do so is contrary to the idea of bringing cases to a "contemporary status"
- ➤ Egos most investigators have something to offer do not hesitate to request assistance from outside agencies and organizations



Questions?

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National Resource and Technical Assistance Center for Improving Law Enforcement Investigations (NRTAC)

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