

**POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM
(PERF)**

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COWBOYS: A Problem Solving Initiative

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Cowboys: A Problem Solving Initiative

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ABSTRACT

Cowboys: A Problem Solving Initiative

Abstract

Arlington, Texas, Police Department

1996-1998

SCANNING

Cowboys is a country-western night club in Arlington, Texas which is located in a remodeled K-Mart department store. With a maximum occupancy of over 3000 people, the typically large crowds are drawn from several surrounding counties.

When there are too many patrons for the club to hold, patrons will wait outside in hopes of being allowed to enter when others leave. Patrons leaving have likely been consuming alcohol, since Cowboys sells more alcohol than any other related Arlington business. On over-capacity nights, complaints from area residents are plentiful.

Analysis

Our analysis of calls for service data showed that *Cowboys* generated more calls than any other location in its beat—287 calls during an eight-month period. Most calls were for public intoxication, although assaults and disturbances greatly contributed to the volume. Cowboys also appeared to be generating a high number Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) and Public Intoxication (PI) offenders off property. It was also noted that some of *Cowboys'* customers were repeat offenders, when it came to causing problems at the club.

Meetings were held with officers who worked the beats impacted by *Cowboys* to determine the extent and scope of the problem, beyond what could be learned from a straightforward analysis

of the data. Officers cited the high number of calls related to assaults and intoxicated persons, and the club's apparent inability to control these problems before police involvement.

RESPONSE

Our traditional response to these problems was to assign additional personnel or assemble "task forces". Management considered these traditional strategies, but opted to seek non-traditional responses, in hopes of achieving long term benefits for the Department and *Cowboys*.

The development of a cooperative partnership between the Department and the club's management, to deal with these and other problems involving the club, were the key to our subsequent success.

ASSESSMENT

The results of our efforts to date have been very successful. From January 1, 1996, to present, the average calls-for-service per day has dropped 33%. The number of intoxication related arrests generated has also been reduced dramatically.

In the final analysis, the SARA model allowed us to view the problem at *Cowboys* from a very different perspective. It enabled us to understand the difference between symptoms and causes. It helped us realize that working with a cooperative partner can reduce a problem long term, while dedicating expensive additional resources may not.

DESCRIPTION

Cowboys: A Problem Solving Initiative

Arlington, Texas, Police Department

1996-1998

The City of Arlington, Texas lies in the virtual center of the region known as the Dallas/ Fort Worth Metroplex. It is the second largest city in Tarrant County with a population estimated at 297,000 people. Arlington is well known for its entertainment attractions, which include the Ballpark in Arlington, (home of the Texas Rangers Baseball Club), Six Flags Over Texas Amusement Park and the Hurricane Harbor Water Park. The University of Texas at Arlington and the southeast campus of Tarrant County Junior College are also within the City limits. The City is also home to a multitude of smaller entertainment businesses and nightclubs.

Adult nightclubs and related entertainment centers cause unique problems for law enforcement agencies even when they ostensibly comply with applicable regulations and ordinances. Specifically, the nightclubs frequently contribute collateral calls for service, such as fighting and alcohol consumption by intoxicated persons in parking lots, neighborhood disturbances, and traffic related problems such as DUI/DWI. Frequently, club management regards anything that happens outside their doors as "someone else's problem." In fact, the presence of these clubs directly contributes to a significant increase in calls for police service.

The Arlington Police Department was experiencing such a problem with *Cowboys*, a country-western club & dance hall within our city limits. By using the *SARA* Problem Solving Model, we developed a strategy that included both the club's management and the police department in a problem solving initiative. The results of our efforts have far exceeded expectations, supporting

the notion that the Problem Solving Model can greatly enhance a police department's ability to minimize the impact of a problem location on precious patrol resources.

SCANNING

What was the nature of the problem?

Cowboys is part of a country-western night club chain. The club in Arlington, Texas is located in a remodeled K-Mart department store near the city's eastern border. The club's massive dance floor is surrounded by seating areas, multiple cash bars, and billiard tables. "Big Name" acts frequently appear at the club, and with a maximum occupancy of over 3000 people, the crowds are drawn from several surrounding counties.

Cowboys draws large crowds every night of the week, especially on weekends, "Ladies Nights" (Wednesdays), and when a major entertainer performs. Frequently, there are too many patrons for the club to hold. In these instances it is common for patrons to wait outside in hopes of being allowed to enter when the number inside drops below the required maximum. Patrons leaving the club have likely been drinking¹, which can contribute to a potentially volatile mixture in the club's parking lot and peripheral areas. On over-capacity nights, patrons use the surrounding residential areas and apartment complexes for overflow parking.

How was the problem identified?

Who identified the problem?

The Arlington Police Department operates under a geographic policing model, in which police managers are assigned a section of the City for accountability purposes. The Sector Lieutenant

¹ Tax reports from the State Comptroller's Office indicate that *Cowboys* has the most liquor sales in Arlington each month.

recognized that *Cowboys* generated more calls for police service than any other location in beat 420. Most of the calls were related to or created by the fact that *Cowboys* is an establishment for on-premise consumption of alcohol. This did not include calls for service from surrounding areas that were caused by patrons coming and going. In addition, *Cowboys* consistently ranked at or near the top of the bar listing published by the APD Traffic Division that reported where Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) and Public Intoxication (PI) offenders were coming from. The list is compiled by asking arrested persons during the book-in process, where they were drinking prior to the arrest. Officers assigned to the area also recognized that they were frequently called to *Cowboys* to transport arrested intoxicated subjects, were making DWI arrests originating from the location, and responding to various related complaints from area residents. Residents complained of patrons blocking driveways, urinating in their yards, or throwing trash on their property, and of damaged vehicles and landscaping.

Analysis

What methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem?

Our preliminary analysis of calls for police service data showed that *Cowboys* generated more calls than any other location in its beat—287 calls during an eight-month period. Most calls were for public intoxication, although assaults and disturbances greatly contributed to the volume. It was also noted that some of *Cowboys'* customers were repeat offenders, when it came to causing problems at the club.

The club policy was not to detain intoxicated persons inside or even to deal with them until they generated some other type incident, such as a fight or disturbance. In spite of this policy, Public Intoxication offenses accounted for 16% of the on-premise calls, and off-duty constables that

worked in the parking lot of the club generated the majority of these. On the parking lots, these constables, (who are commissioned police officers who work for Tarrant County²), detained intoxicated subjects and called the Arlington Police to report the incident much like any other citizen does. The one major difference is that the constables would use whatever force was necessary to detain the subject if they were attempting to leave. This presented two possible problems: (1) the responding Arlington officer may receive a prisoner without complete knowledge of any force used (2) The constables wear blue police uniforms that are very similar to Arlington Police uniforms. Most intoxicated arrestees would assume the entire arrest procedure was performed by an Arlington Police Officer.

In December 1996 and January 1997, we convened several meetings with officers and supervisors who worked the beats impacted by *Cowboys*. The purpose was to determine the extent and scope of the problem, beyond what could be learned from a straightforward analysis of the data. In other words, we wanted to scan the problem from an analytical, or data driven approach, and an experiential, or anecdotal basis.

These officers were very insightful and the results provided a more thorough analysis and a firm basis for our problem solving efforts. **Four problems that consistently required a significant number of police resources were identified:**

- 1. A high number of assaults were occurring in the club, and in the parking lot surrounding it.** *Not surprisingly, nearly all of these involved alcohol or intoxication on the part of the offender.*

¹ Arlington officers are forbidden by policy from working off duty jobs in bars.

2. **A high number of calls for police service were being generated to respond to assaults and intoxicated persons on Cowboys premises.** *The 287 calls in the initial analysis, were the most for any single location in Beat 420.*
3. **A significant amount of officer time was required to complete these calls.** *The APD average for clearing a single call is 45 minutes, and if arrest is involved the expended time is significantly higher.*
4. **A significant number of DWI and PI offenders from Cowboy's were being arrested off the premises, all over the City.** *This impacted many other APD geographic districts and operational divisions.*

RESPONSE

What range of possible response alternatives was considered to deal with the problem?

From a police perspective, *Cowboys* presented a unique set of problems, given its sheer size and customer capacity. Our traditional response to these problems was to simply assign additional personnel or insert "task forces" to deal with specific outcomes, as opposed to dealing with the causes of the problems we encountered. While these traditional responses may have achieved some measure of short-term success, they did not affect the long-term solution we were seeking. Supervisory personnel considered these traditional strategies, but decided to pursue the non-traditional, in hopes of achieving long term benefits for the Department and *Cowboys*.

What responses did you use to address the problem?

An important component of our problem-solving efforts was the development of a partnership between the department and the club's management, and this theme was consistent throughout the problem identification meetings, Management's willingness to cooperate with the police to create a safe environment for their customers was critical to the program's overall success, and quite frankly we are not sure how successful our efforts would have been without this level of cooperation.

Management's willingness to cooperate with the police to create a safe environment for their customers was critical to the program's overall success.

In late January 1997, the police department met with *Cowboys* management. The primary goals were to develop a cooperative agreement, identify ways to reduce demands on police services and provide a higher level of safety for customers. A major part of this interaction was educating *Cowboys* management as to the overall effects the club has on police services and the surrounding communities. This allowed the club management to view the problems from a different perspective; a corporate neighbor as opposed to a foreign adversary.

This meeting resulted in five specific programs designed to meet these goals. The club's management agreed to:

=> **Create a database of persons arrested at, or ejected from, the club.** *During call analysis it was discovered that some patrons were causing repeated problems at the club.*

- => **Give all persons arrested at the club a criminal trespass³ warning and advise them that returning may result in prosecution.** *The intent was to send a message to potential troublemakers, that the club did not want or need their business.*
- => **Provide more training to beverage servers in how to recognize intoxicated persons.⁴** *Beverage servers previously arrested for "serving to an intoxicated person " would often say they did not realize the person they were sen/ing was drunk.*
- => **Continually reinforce to their beverage servers that intoxicated persons are not to be served alcoholic beverages.** *As stated earlier, Cowboys management originally felt it was not their responsibility to monitor a customer's drinking activity.*
- => **Quickly identify patrons who have had too much to drink and ask them to stop consuming alcoholic beverages before a police action is required.** *This would require further education of club employees in intoxication recognition.*

Perhaps, the most important aspect of the Police Department's involvement, however, was the commitment we made to continue our relationship with the club's management. We made it very clear that this was not simply a one-time effort on our part, but a long-term commitment to provide a safe environment for the club's customers and reduce calls for police service.

ASSESSMENT

What were the results?

The results of our efforts to date have been very successful. From January 1, 1996, to September 30, 1996, *Cowboys* generated 261 calls for service (.92 per day). After implementation of our

³ Texas law provides that a person may be arrested for Criminal Trespass, if they are warned away from a location in the presence of a Peace Officer.

Problem Solving efforts, the number of calls from October 1996 to May 1997 was reduced to 190 (.78 per day). For the most recent year (June 1997-May 1998) the number of calls was 222, which represented a **call per day average of .61.** *Cowboys* dropped from a consistent first or second place on the Traffic Division DWI and PI report, to frequently not making the top 10. By any measure, the partnership we formed with the club's management produced dramatic, positive results.

The use of SARA enabled us to understand the difference between symptoms and causes.

In the final analysis, we are convinced that the SARA' model allowed us to view the problem at *Cowboys* from a very different perspective. Prior to SARA, we would have simply stepped up enforcement activity at the club without addressing the factors that led to the increased demand on police services. Using SARA enabled us to understand the difference between symptoms and causes. It helped us realize that the only effective way to deal with the problems outside the club was to deal with behavior inside the club.

We continue to monitor activity at *Cowboys* and adjust or modify our approach to problems that might arise. But, whatever situations we might face, we feel certain we have established an effective partnership with the club's management and a model—the SARA model—to develop effective responses to problems that develop.

⁴ APD Officers assisted with intoxication recognition training for *Cowboys* personnel.

Agency and Officer Information

1. This initiative was adopted at the Sector level. The City is divided into 9 Sectors based on calls-for-service data, and each sector has approximately 30,000 people. Each sector contains 3 beats, the sector is commanded by a Lieutenant, and each beat by a Sergeant.
2. The Sector Lieutenant had received some basic training in POP prior to the project beginning.
3. There were no additional incentives given to officers involved in Problem solving initiatives.
4. The primary resource for guidance was Goldstein's, Problem Oriented Policing.
5. There were no significant problems noted.
6. The only resources required for the project were the personnel already assigned to the Sector. There were no additional budget outlays.
7. Project Contact Person:

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Cowboy's- Offense Comparison (Problem Assessment)_{ongoing}

October to May

