

# Best Practices Guide



International Association of Chiefs of Police

Smaller Police Departments  
Technical Assistance Program

## Developing a Police Department Policy-Procedure Manual

*by W. Dwayne Orrick*

This project supported by a grant from:



**BJA**  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
U.S. Department of Justice

# Best Practices Guide for Developing a Police Department Policy-Procedure Manual

*W. Dwayne Orrick*

## Introduction

This guide has been designed to assist police agencies in smaller communities with the development and revision of their policy-procedure manuals. The policy and procedures manual is the foundation for all of the department's operations. When properly developed and implemented, a policy-procedure manual provides staff with the information to act decisively, consistently, and legally. It also promotes confidence and professional conduct among staff.

Service delivery by agencies in smaller communities is often more responsive than departments in larger communities due to knowledge of partnerships within the community. Officers working in smaller agencies must be prepared for the same challenges and situations as their colleagues in larger organizations. In addition, their response to these situations are held to the same legal and professional standards as larger communities. The only real difference between large and small is the degree of specialization in job assignments in smaller departments. Officers in smaller agencies are generalists, often seeing cases through from start to finish. Because of this, they are provided more latitude to perform their jobs and are not locked into the same routine every day, allowing for more growth, job enhancement, and satisfaction. Therefore, policies and procedures for smaller agencies must be as thorough and complete as in their larger counterparts.

The remainder of this guide will focus on the process of developing a manual in smaller departments. It will explore the general rules for developing policies, forming a policy committee, accessing information, organizing the manual, writing a policy, implementing a new policy, and conducting compliance inspections.

## Definitions

Organizations call their policy and procedures manual different names – policy and procedures, operations manual, or standard operating procedures. Regardless of the name, the document provides staff with the guidance necessary to perform department operations. Before outlining the process for developing an operations manual, it is necessary to provide a baseline of terminology. Several terms will be used during the development of a manual. It is necessary to distinguish between each:

- Standard – Professional or legal guidelines or performance requirements that establish benchmarks for agencies to use in developing the organizational structure and measuring its service delivery system.
- Policy - A course or line of action adopted and pursued by an agency that provides general guidance on the department's philosophy on identified issues.
- Procedure - A detailed description of how a policy is to be accomplished. It describes the steps to be taken, the frequency of the task, and the persons responsible for completing the tasks.

- General Orders - Written directives related to policy, procedures, rules and regulations involving more than one organizational unit. General orders typically have a broad statement of policy as well as the procedures for implementing the policy.
- Special Orders - Directives regulating one segment of the department or a statement of policy and procedure regarding a specific circumstance or event that is temporary in nature.
- Personnel Orders - Announcements of changes in status of personnel such as transfers or promotions.
- Rules and Regulations - Procedures that apply each and every time a situation occurs with specific guidelines for staff to follow. Rules and regulations usually proscribe specific behavior that will result in employees being disciplined for failing to follow the guidelines provided.<sup>1</sup>
- Post Orders – Specific processes and duties to be performed at assigned locations or posts (i.e. front desk, security positions)
- Employee Handbook - Manual provided by the governing authority that introduces employees to the organization, its benefits/compensation package, and an abbreviated listing of policies.

## **Rules for Effective Manual Development and Implementation**

When developing operational policy and procedures, several general principles should be remembered.

- First, the operations manual should be comprehensive, providing staff with direction and guidance for all aspects of the department's operations.
- Second, the manual should be clearly written and easy to use.
- Third, the manual should be consistent with and mirror the organizational philosophy, legal requirements, and applicable standards.
- Fourth, staff should be involved in the development of the manual and kept informed of any changes.
- Fifth, staff should receive adequate training and participate in open, frank discussions about the policy and the reasons for its requirements.
- Sixth, the operations manual should be considered a living document. Routine inspections and reviews should be completed to ensure compliance with its directives so that the manual remains current.<sup>2</sup>
- Seventh, the manual should reflect and incorporate accepted state and national best practices. For example, model policies like those developed by the IACP's National Law Enforcement Policy Center or other law enforcement organization's general guidelines for policy-procedure manuals as developed by CALEA (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement) or state law enforcement associations.

## **Formation of the Policy Committee**

Developing a policy manual is a substantial undertaking. One of the first tasks to be completed is the selection of a policy project coordinator. The selection of the proper person for this position is critical to the success of the development and implementation of the operations manual. The individual must have the written communication skills to compose and edit the document in a grammatically correct manner that flows

in an easy-to-understand manner. This requires patience and attention to detail. In most agencies, this appointment is not a full-time assignment. Instead, the person must complete these responsibilities in addition to their current duties. In very small agencies the police chief may serve as the coordinator. Regardless of who is selected, the person serving as the policy project coordinator must have the authority, knowledge, and motivation to make assignments, draft policies, coordinate meetings, and complete the process. In addition, the coordinator must have sufficient administrative or clerical support to expedite the development process.

While one person can write the manual, the final product will likely be more complete, comprehensive, and accepted by staff, if it is developed with contributions from both sworn and civilian representatives of the agency. Diverse, heterogeneous groups tend to be more effective with complex problems and assignments than a homogeneous group or an individual.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is strongly suggested that as many staff as practical be involved in the manual's development and implementation. To accomplish this, many departments have organized policy committees to assist with development of the manual.

Involving staff in the development process provides a vehicle for employees' abilities to be both challenged and recognized. It is recommended the chief post a memorandum or intra-office e-mail explaining the development/revision process of the operations manual. Supervisors should ask for persons who are interested in assisting with the effort. In addition to volunteers, the policy committee should involve employees who may be critical of the department's operations. Many times, these staff members provide information that can improve operations within the department. Inclusion of individuals with vocal opposition provides a safe avenue to discuss contentious issues and promote the resolution of conflicts. Alternatively, alienation of critics only fuels their cynicism and undermines the agency's cohesion and morale. Finally, there may also be a need to involve legal counsel and persons from other agencies, particularly those with special knowledge areas.

## **Sources of Information**

When preparing to develop each area of the manual, a variety of sources should be reviewed for information to be included in the policy.

The local government's charter usually outlines the department's authority. Similarly, local, state, and federal laws and applicable court decisions proscribe standards of performance for department compliance.

Collective bargaining agreements, consent orders, and court decrees often:

- List requirements for the employment process;
- Describe individual duties and responsibilities;
- Outline discipline and grievance procedures, compensation and benefits programs.

The governing authority's procedures are binding upon the department's operations in many areas, particularly employment procedures and compensation benefits. The department's procedures may be more strict or detailed but, cannot conflict with policies of the governing authority or they will automatically be considered null and void.

Intergovernmental agreements and contracts for services, such as detention of inmates or dispatch operations, may include requirements that should be considered and included in the operational procedures.

Mutual aid agreements, emergency operation plans and previously agreed upon protocols (i.e. child abuse/molestation investigations) often outline binding procedures for officers to follow while working with other agencies. Because these documents are often updated on a schedule different than the review of the

manual, it is good to place the latest copy of the agreements in the appendices and refer to them in the body of the policy.

Standards such as the **Standards for Law Enforcement Agencies** by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) or standards promulgated for state certification programs provide the benchmarks for professional conduct and are an excellent cornerstone for department operations.

Existing departmental policies, procedures, and general orders, provide ample direction for officers and should not be arbitrarily abandoned. With a little modification to ensure consistency in structure with the new manual, these procedures can be easily included in the manual. In many cases, the department's informal operating processes simply need to be recorded.

Since police operations are similar throughout the United States, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Model policies provide a baseline to begin the development of a manual. There are a number of sources for model operating policies including the IACP National Law Enforcement Model Policy Center and state police chiefs' associations. Because of the diversity in the size of communities, state laws, and operational philosophies between agencies, it is difficult to develop a policy that is applicable in all departments. Consequently, model policies should be thought of as general guidelines to be used in the development of the department's manual.

Policies from other departments are also an excellent resource for expediting the development process. Copies of manuals may be acquired from neighboring departments that have completed state certification or national accreditation. In addition, manuals can be obtained or requested on internet sites such as IACP Net. In many cases, these policies can be downloaded in an electronic format, which simplifies the editorial process. The tendency is for departments to copy manuals from other communities verbatim. This process is completely acceptable if the manual represents the department's philosophy and procedures and is consistent with legal guidelines. However, this is usually not the case and considerable editing is usually required.

#### **Tips:**

- Academic research journals, trade magazines, and training lesson plans are a good source for policy and procedure background information and address areas that may be overlooked in particular subjects. Examples: **Journal of Criminal Justice**, **International Journal of Police Strategies and Management**, and **The Police Chief**.
- Interview subject matter experts (i.e. records clerks, evidence custodians, and narcotic agents), and persons such as law enforcement leaders and legal counsel whose contributions are critical to the manual's success.

## **Organization of the Manual**

Before beginning to write the manual, several issues relating to formatting must be discussed and decided including scope, headers, pagination, key phrases, and index.

The scope of the manual must be identified. Smaller agencies typically have one comprehensive manual that regulates all of the department's administration and operations. Larger agencies have found it necessary to have more than one manual for functional areas such as administration, patrol, investigations, and detention.<sup>4</sup>

The beginning of each new section of the manual should be divided with a tab that readily identifies the chapter's subject or number. Each policy must have a header that includes the Agency's Name, Chapter/Policy Number, Title, Effective Date (originally implemented), Revised Date (Current Revision),

Number of Pages in the section, and to whom the policy is distributed. Before the policies can be finalized, the format for the header must be designed and approved.

Because manuals tend to be rather voluminous, it is necessary to develop a pagination system to ensure the reader can easily identify and locate specific areas. This system should identify the exact policy and page. For example, 5-1.3 indicates the location is Chapter 5.1, page 3. There are several derivations of this format.

To ensure consistency, key phrases such as detention facility vs. jail, investigator vs. detective, and shift vs. watch must be identified, discussed, and decided upon for consistency throughout the entire manual.

As the policy manual is being developed, broad topic areas to be covered must be identified. Reviewing model manuals or other departments' policies may provide insight into developing these categories and the specific policies to be included in each area. Each policy should be organized in the sequential order they are to appear in the manual. Some policies may not be finalized until issues are addressed and resolved in other policies. Therefore, it may be necessary for the coordinator to prioritize the order in which the policies must be composed.

Finally, some departments have found it useful to provide an index in the appendices of the manual to assist in readily locating relevant policies. The index cannot be compiled until the manual is completed. If the document is accessed electronically, staff can use 'key words' to search for relative policies/directives.

## **Committee Review**

After the topics to be included in the manual have been identified and finalized, the drafting of policies can begin. To ensure the manual is developed in a timely manner, a schedule should be developed to outline the tasks to be completed, time expected to complete the tasks, persons responsible, and deadlines for completing each task. This schedule helps the committee to prioritize their work activity and focus their attention on the manual's development. For these same reasons, an agenda should be developed and distributed at every committee meeting. Otherwise, the meetings will likely get off track and fail to accomplish anything. There are a number of ways to compose an operations manual. The process of policy development typically includes the following steps:

### **Policy Development Steps**

1. The policy committee meets and members reach a consensus regarding what should be included in each section. Any discussion points, questions, and concerns identified during meetings should be noted by the coordinator and addressed at the next meeting.
2. Using the information provided by the committee, the project coordinator (or the designated committee member) develops all draft policies (see "Steps for Writing Operating Procedures" below). The policy development committee should not be used to write the manual. If members were expected to compose the manual as a collective group, it would never get done.
3. Copies of the draft policy are sent to committee members for review and comment.
4. Committee members may individually return their draft copies with comments to the coordinator or meet as a group to discuss their concerns. As the manual is reviewed, committee members should be primarily concerned with the validity of the policies. That is, does the policy regulate or direct department operations and employee conduct in the manner in which it was intended. Any contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies should be identified and corrected. This review should also ensure each policy is grammatically correct, correctly spelled, and easily understood.
5. The coordinator reviews the comments by the committee and makes the necessary changes to the drafts.
6. Copies of the subsequent draft are sent to the committee members for review. In some cases, it may be necessary to repeat Steps 4 and 5 several times.
7. The coordinator submits the final draft to the department's legal counsel to ensure the proposed policy is in compliance with current local, state, and federal laws. There are differing opinions about the decision to

have legal counsel review each policy or restricting the review to areas of high liability and where legal questions exist. This is a decision that should be made by leaders in each community.

8. When the legal review is complete, any comments or changes may be sent to the committee for final review. In some communities, it may be necessary to send the approved policy to the City Manager or governing authority for review.
9. Upon final review and approval by the chief, the coordinator places the policy in final form and prepares it for distribution to department staff.

## Procedure Development Steps

Before embarking upon the procedure development, it is recommended the committee take the time to identify and articulate the department's core values, mission statement and vision statement. While the manual can be developed without these documents, it can prove invaluable to developing the organization and its culture. Embedding the organizational values throughout the manual will encourage desired behaviors by officers as well as a strong and consistent value system throughout the department. In many cases departments have found it necessary to contract with a facilitator to assist with the development of these statements.

When writing the procedures, the use of scenarios can be helpful tools in the development process, clarifying each component of the procedure and the supporting agency values and mission. Completing the scenario helps to identify the duties and functions that must be completed with each task.

## Steps for Writing Operating Procedures

1. Start with the end in mind. Assuming an officer completes the scenario successfully, identify the desired outcome. (Goal)
2. Review the literature/research material for issues that should be addressed in the policy being developed. Also review the committee's notes of discussion points, questions, and concerns.
3. Outline the actions/steps to be completed to achieve the goal or complete the function successfully. (What)
4. Place the outlined steps in sequential order. (When)
5. Identify the person/positions to be involved in completing the tasks in Steps 2 and 3. (Who)
6. Be sure to identify and include any special equipment, supplies, and materials to be used with the procedure.
7. Compose the draft directive and submit it to the policy committee for review.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted the tone of the language used in the manual subtly impacts the organizational culture. Unreasonable restrictions in operational policy have oftentimes been the source of dissension between line and supervisory staff. The purpose of the manual is to empower the staff. So it is important to recognize every possible scenario cannot be identified and officers should be allowed the latitude they need for making decisions in unusual circumstances. If a negative tone is used in the manual (e.g., shall not, will not, are not, forbidden) it can permeate the ranks and promote cynical attitudes in staff. Consequently, the text of the manual should avoid focusing on prohibited acts, but rather emphasize conduct the department expects and supports of officers. Finally, there are very few absolutes in law enforcement. The courts have ruled that terms such as should, are to, and directed to, are not absolute. The use of "shall" is an absolute, and means under all circumstances and conditions officers will act in the manner described or directed. In addition, some courts have held the use of the term 'will' is very close to an absolute. Because it is difficult to identify

circumstances when officers are to always act in the same exact manner, the use of absolute language should be avoided whenever possible.

## **Implementation**

After the manual has received final approval, it is ready to be implemented. Traditionally, this has been accomplished by first printing copies with a high capacity printer or photocopy machine. If a commercial printer is used, the agency should have an agreement with the printer to ensure extra or discarded copies are destroyed or returned to the department.

If a paper copy of the operations manual is used, it is best to issue them in a three ring binder. This allows easy modification and addition to existing policy. As each manual is issued it should be stamped with a sequential serial number that is recorded as being assigned to the officer. As with most department equipment, officers may be required to sign for the manual when it is issued to them.

Today most agencies post their manual on the department's computer server to ensure the policies are accessible and easy to search at all times. Regardless of the format, having the entire manual distributed at one time will likely overwhelm officers. It is highly recommended to distribute new policies incrementally as they are developed and approved. This incremental process provides staff a better opportunity to digest its requirements.

When distributing a new policy, some agencies inappropriately require officers to sign a form indicating they have received, read, understand and agree to follow a new policy. This forces staff to indicate they understand and will abide by a policy before they have been provided an opportunity to read and resolve any questions. The preferred approach to follow when a new policy is issued is to give staff ample time to read the policy to identify expectations of performance, note legitimate questions, and detect any issues that need to be resolved.

Next, officers must be trained on the policies to ensure that they fully understand their requirements before they are implemented. This training should cover administrative and operational topics, with particular emphasis being placed on high-liability issues. This process may include both classroom as well as practical exercises.

Once a policy is implemented, officers can usually refer to the manual for clarification. However, for high liability and critical policies, officers must have a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the policy. For example, every employee must be able to immediately recall specific details of policy requirements for topics such as use of force and vehicle pursuit directives. To ensure officers understand and comprehend the policy and its expectations, each should be tested on critical topics. After the testing is complete, incorrect responses should be reviewed with the officer. If an officer fails a test or several officers miss the same question, additional training should be provided.

In addition to introductory training, time may be designated during in-service training to review the department's operational procedures relating to the topic of instruction. This is a convenient way to ensure training is relevant and staff remain current on the department's standards of performance.

When the training is complete, documentation should be maintained that officers have been issued the policy, trained on the content, and understand its requirements. This documentation may include a copy of the policy, lesson plan, power point slides, handouts, sign-in attendance sheets, tests given to measure comprehension, and officers' test scores. Manually tracking and maintaining records of distribution can be cumbersome and time consuming. To simplify the documentation process, agencies should consider using a digital format to track testing, record issuance, and understanding of policy content.



Finally, 'master' copies of previous policies must be maintained to answer questions of why specific actions may have been taken or if litigation is filed against the agency. These records will be critical for resolving questions regarding department practices during that time.

## **Inspection and Review**

Once the new manual has been implemented, only half of the work is completed. Department officials must ensure the policies are being followed. If work is not done in accordance with the policy, the manual is meaningless because the custom is the policy. This situation is more problematic than not having a policy. Informal customs attack the credibility of the department's operational procedures and administration. It also increases the department's exposure to potential liability.

What gets inspected is what gets done. There are several ways to ensure compliance with the manual. One way is to form a check sheet that lists various inspections that are to be conducted, by staff and the frequency of the inspections. It is a simple process of checking off when the inspection is complete. In some cases, policy may require internal and external inspections.

In the event officers are not in compliance with the department policy, a decision must be made as to the appropriate corrective action, ranging from remedial training to counseling to punishment. In some cases, a change in policy may be required.

Finally, the entire manual should be reviewed on at least an annual basis. This review helps to ensure the manual is in compliance with current management, operational, and legal standards. Instead of trying to eat the elephant in one bite, it is best to coordinate this review with key personnel over several weeks. As the review is conducted, listen to the staff closest to the service delivery. They know the problems and often have the best ideas for addressing them. If modifications are necessary, the same procedures outlined in this guide should be followed for updating, distributing, and training staff of the changes.

## **Conclusion**

Developing, maintaining, and revising a police department's operations manual is a monumental undertaking. If completed properly, the community, its governing authority, chief executive, and department's staff can be assured their operations are in compliance with current standards. It will ensure staff act in a consistent, professional and legal manner. It will also ensure department staff are prepared for unusual circumstances and the correct course of action is identified.

### **About the Author**

*W. Dwayne Orrick has more than 34 years law enforcement experience including 22 years as a police chief and public safety director. He holds a Bachelors of Arts in Criminal Justice and Masters of Public Administration from the University of Georgia. Orrick is a graduate of the 186<sup>th</sup> Session of the FBI National Academy.*

# Bibliography

- <sup>1</sup> Carpenter, Michael, “Put it in Writing: The Police Policy Manual”, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, October 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> Orrick, Dwayne, Model Jail Operations Manual for Georgia Detention Facilities, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 1987
- <sup>3</sup> Prince, Dr. Howard, John Halstead, and Larry Hesser, Leadership in Police Organizations, International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2002, p.208
- <sup>4</sup> Kinnaird, Brian A., “Policy and Procedure Manual: A Didactic Model for Law Enforcement Administrators”, Sheriff, February 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> Martin, Mark D., Developing and Revising Detention Facility Policies and Procedures, National Institute of Corrections, U. S. Department of Justice, April 2002

# Sample Organization of Department Operations Manual

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Agency Jurisdiction and Mutual Aid</b>
2-1	Law Enforcement Role and Authority
2-2	Contract Services
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Organization and Direction</b>
3-1	Management of Information
3-2	Goals and Objectives
3-3	Fiscal Management
3-4	Hiring Standards
3-5	Promotion/Appointment Procedures
3-6	Performance Evaluations
3-7	Career Development
3-8	Job Analysis and Classification
3-9	Planning and Research
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Training</b>
4-1	Fitness Standards
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Conduct</b>
5-1	Discipline
5-2	Internal Investigations
5-3	Conduct Review Board
5-4	Outside Employment
5-5	Sexual Harassment
5-6	Receiving Civil Process Served Department/Employees
5-7	Polygraph
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Uniform and Dress Code</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Arrest</b>
7-1	Taking Suspects into Custody
7-2	Processing of Juvenile Offenders
7-3	Family Violence
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Search and Seizure</b>
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Firearms</b>
<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>Use of Force</b>
10-1	Use of Force Reports
10-2	Investigation of Use of Deadly Force
10-3	Critical Incident/Post Critical Incident
10-4	Line of Duty Seriously Injured/Death of Officer
<b>Chapter 11</b>	<b>Vehicle Operations</b>
11-1	Vehicle Pursuits
11-2	Interjurisdictional Pursuits
11-3	Vehicle Inspections and Maintenance
11-4	Personally Assigned Patrol Vehicles
11-5	In-Car Video Camera Film Procedures
<b>Chapter 12</b>	<b>Property and Evidence</b>
12-1	Departmental Property Control
12-2	Vehicle Inventory/Impound
12-3	Blood and Urine Test Kits
<b>Chapter 13</b>	<b>Records Division Operations</b>
13-1	Release of Information

<b>Chapter 14</b>	<b>Traffic and Parking Enforcement</b>
14-1	Traffic Citations (Special Processing)
14-2	Traffic Accident Investigation
14-3	Traffic Direction and Control
14-4	Use of Radar
<b>Chapter 15</b>	<b>Patrol Functions</b>
15-1	Investigating Suspicious Activity
15-2	Foot Pursuits
15-3	Racial Profiling
15-4	Blood Borne Pathogens
15-5	Courtroom Building Security
15-6	Taxicab Inspections
15-7	Administrative Notification
15-8	Hazardous Materials
15-9	On-Call Procedures
15-10	Citizen Ride-Along Program
15-11	Handling Mentally Ill Persons
15-12	Unusual Occurrences
15-13	Missing Persons
15-14	Rights of Victims and Witnesses
<b>Chapter 16</b>	<b>Criminal Investigation Division</b>
16-1	Covert and Raid Operations
16-2	Crime Analysis
16-3	Arson Protocol
16-4	Crime Scene Processing
16-5	Civil Condemnation Actions
16-6	Informants
<b>Chapter 17</b>	<b>Animal Control</b>
<b>Chapter 18</b>	<b>Communications</b>
18-1	Tactical Dispatch Plans