

# TELEMASP BULLETIN

## TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

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### Information Sources for Administrative Decision Making

Information is a critical commodity for administrative decision making. For police managers, it is essential that a wide range of information sources is used to give an accurate picture of the issues being addressed. Community concerns, internal department issues, and research results are examples of the diverse information sources, each of which is likely to provide a different perspective. Recognizing that different sources may also provide conflicting views of an issue complicates the problem.

For example, controversy has arisen concerning the effectiveness of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). Some research indicates that D.A.R.E. has not achieved its stated goals. Other research suggests that D.A.R.E. has accomplished its goals, albeit at minimal levels. Politicians generally support the continuation of D.A.R.E. because it is both emotionally and symbolically indicative that government officials are "doing something" about the drug problem among young people. Some police executives want to eliminate D.A.R.E. because they feel the program consumes too many resources in comparison to their "return" on investment. Other police leaders want to drop D.A.R.E. simply because they feel it is not a police responsibility to provide drug education. Yet

other police executives want to continue D.A.R.E. because they feel that the ancillary benefits derived from the program justify the resources. Which perspective is "right"? For a police manager trying to decide whether to keep, expand, or eliminate D.A.R.E., there is a need to assess information reflecting differing perspectives, with particular emphasis on his/her home community in order to make a decision which is administratively reasonable and politically viable.

How can this be accomplished? There is no formula, but there are processes which can be used. In order to assist Texas police administrators in this regard, the LEMIT Executive Issues Seminar Series included a program entitled "Acquiring Information for Administrative Decision Making." The intent was to provide a framework of issues and resources useful for collecting and consuming data as well as ultimately making decisions. Sections of the seminar included presentations and discussions on the types of information available from:

- Community Groups
- City/County Departments
- Police Organizations
- Employee Associations

*Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas*

- Elected Officials
- The Internet

As part of the seminars, all police manager attendees were given a survey to document their experience with various information resources as well as the frequency with which these sources were used. This Bulletin documents the results reported by the 188 respondents to that survey.

### The Respondents

Given that the Executive Issues Seminars are open only to the highest ranking police officials, it is not surprising that the respondents' average years of law enforcement experience was high: 22.5 years. Similarly, 60.1% were aged 41-50 and 98.7% of the respondents were male. Eighty-six percent of the police executives responding to the survey were white while 10% were Hispanic and 4% were black. Generally speaking, respondents were from jurisdictions with populations of at least 10,000 documented residents. Attendance at the seminar is limited to those holding at least bureau command responsibilities. Hence, ranks were all above the captain level.

### Professional Organizations

Respondents were given a list of professional organizations and asked about their membership, frequency of attendance at annual meetings, and frequency of contact with the organization to gain information. The organizations included were:

- Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas (CLEAT)
- Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)
- International Association of Chiefs' of Police (IACP)
- International Association of Women Police (IAWP)
- International City Management Association (ICMA)
- International Personnel Management Association (IPMA)

- National Organization for Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
- National Sheriffs' Association (NSA)
- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)
- Sheriffs' Association of Texas (SAT)
- Texas Police Association (TPA)
- Texas Police Chiefs Association (TPCA)

As indicated in Table 1, membership was represented in all of the organizations. By far, the most common organizational membership was the TPA (61%) followed closely by the IACP (57%) with the TPCA membership being the third most common at 38%.

As one would expect, the most frequently attended meetings were these same three organizations. However, it was somewhat surprising that meeting attendance was fairly infrequent. Respondents were asked how often they attended meetings of these professional organizations, using a scale ranging from a value of zero for "Never" to a value of two representing "Always." For both TPA and IACP, the mean response was 0.5; for the TPCA the mean response was 0.4. For the remaining organizations, there was essentially no attendance at the meetings. Thus, attendance at organizational meetings, even in the most frequently reported cases, was relatively rare.

Based on these results, the questions one might ask are: Why did the respondents join these organizations? Was it to use the organization as a resource to assist with gaining information on problems or issues? In this respect, respondents were asked to rate the annual frequency they made inquiries to these organizations on a scale rating "Never" as a zero and "More Than 5 Times" as a three. As illustrated in Table 2, the highest frequency of contact was with both the IACP and TPA, both of which produced an average of 0.9, indicating that the frequency of contact was barely once a year, with most members never contacting the organization.

Table 1

Membership in Police Organizations

Percent Who:	Are A Member	Attend Meetings			Mean
		Never (0)	Occasionally (1)	Always (2)	
CLEAT	18	93	6	1	.07
FOP	2	98	2	1	.03
IACP	57	60	32	8	.49
IAWP	3	98	2	0	.02
ICMA	3	98	2	0	.02
IPMA	3	98	2	0	.02
NOBLE	2	99	1	0	.01
NSA	7	95	4	1	.06
PERF	9	94	6	0	.06
SAT	11	92	6	3	.11
TPA	61	54	40	6	.52
TPCA	38	67	23	10	.44
Other (Police Labor)	24	87	11	2	.14
Other (Police Specific)	28	79	16	5	.27

Table 2

Number of Times Annually Each Organization Is Contacted for Information  
(In Percent of Respondents)

	Never (0)	1-2 Times	3-5 Times	5+	Mean
CLEAT	75	17	6	3	.37
FOP	89	7	2	3	.18
IACP	39	38	16	7	.91
IAWP	96	4	0	0	.04
ICMA	89	9	2	0	.13
IPMA	90	9	1	0	.11
NOBLE	96	4	0	0	.04
NSA	91	7	2	1	.12
PERF	58	33	8	1	.52
Police Foundation	82	17	2	0	.20
SAT	84	12	2	2	.22
TPA	40	36	20	4	.88
TPCA	59	23	10	8	.67
Other (Police Labor)	76	12	8	4	.41
Other (Police Specific)	68	16	10	6	.54

The question therefore remains, why did the respondents join the organizations if they did not attend the meetings or if they rarely contacted the organization for information or assistance. Is membership used as a means to receive the publications and other materials available to members? Is membership in a professional organization expected of police executives as a professional obligation? Or is it simply because their agency paid for the membership? Given the comments of respondents during the seminar sessions, it was probably a combination of these reasons.

As an information resource for issues and trends facing the police professional as well as a resource to assist in general administrative decision making, the survey respondents highly under-utilized the organizations to which they belonged and supported. Ironically, providing assistance to the professional is the expressed purpose for which these organizations exist. Tables 3 and 4 summarize responses regarding the helpfulness and value of professional organizations.

**Table 3**

**Perceived Helpfulness of Professional Organizations  
in Providing Information (Percent of Respondents)**

Very Helpful	35
Somewhat Helpful	55
A Little Helpful	6
Not Helpful	4

**Table 4**

**Perceived Value of Professional Organizations  
(Percent of Respondents)**

	For Networking	For Training
Very Valuable	38	26
Somewhat Valuable	46	51
A Little Valuable	12	17
Not Valuable	4	7

## Service Organizations

As in the case of professional organizations, respondents were given a list of service or fraternal organizations and asked about their membership as well as the value of their membership. The organizations included were:

- Kiwanis
- Knights of Columbus
- Lions
- Masons
- Odd Fellows
- Optimists
- Rotary International

As depicted in Table 5, the most frequent service organizations respondents reported belonging to were the Masons (32 or 17.1%), Rotary (28 or 14.9%), and the Lions Club (18 or 9.6%). By the nature of the organizations, respondents who were members of these groups attended far more frequently. That is, because the organizations were local, the fact that respondents had friends who were also club members and, in the case of the Rotary Club, because attendance is required, there is far more participation in service club meetings.

Beyond these reasons, during conversations on the issue, most police administrators felt a professional obligation to participate in service clubs within their communities. Indeed, in a number of cases membership was arranged for the police officials and in many cases the police department paid the officer's membership dues. When asked why, the consensus was that membership in these groups was a demonstration of a police executive's attachment to the community as a "member" and "fellow citizen," not just a government employee. Most also felt that membership in service clubs helped the police communicate better with citizens as well as develop greater support for the police simply through the process of becoming acquainted with members on a social basis.

Table 5

## Service Organizational Membership

Percent Who:	Are A Member	Attend Meetings			Mean
		Never (0)	Occasionally (1)	Always (2)	
Kiwanis	2	92	7	1	.09
Rotary	15	78	11	11	.32
Optimists	2	94	5	1	.06
Lions	10	87	9	4	.18
Odd Fellows	0	0	0	0	.00
Knights of Columbus	4	95	4	1	.05
Masons	17	84	15	1	.17
Other Service Group	16	82	9	9	.27

In the context of acquiring information, the seminar participants were nearly unanimous in saying that participation in service organizations was an important tool for gaining community reactions to issues—both that which was solicited by the police and that which was not. While it was recognized by police leaders that these service clubs were not representative of the total community, they were nonetheless disproportionately representative of community leadership.

### Use of Professional Publications

Perhaps one of the best methods to gain information about contemporary issues, trends, research, and ideas is through the reading of professional literature. Taken broadly, literature for a police executive can include many sources ranging from scholarly research journals to “trade” publications and even the local newspaper. From this array of sources, the police administrator can keep a “finger on the pulse” of issues which are critical to a community or the police service.

In assessing the frequency with which police administrators reviewed publications, a list was developed (see Table 6) that represented a cross-section of publication types. Respondents were

asked to rate the frequency with which they read these publications on a scale ranging from zero (Never) to three (Always).

The two most frequently read publications (by significant margins) were the local newspaper and the *TELEMASP Bulletin*, each scoring a 2.5 and a 2.2 respectively on the three point scale. (Note: Although the survey was in no way intended to assess the value of the *TELEMASP Bulletin* series, we were certainly pleased that it is the most frequently read professional publication among Texas police managers.) Reading of professional publications dropped off significantly after these two. Generally speaking, the publications least likely to be read were those which tended to be either technical research reports or those which addressed specialized topics.

The average score of reading frequency was 1.1 which equates to “rarely.” The obvious question which comes to mind is that since reading these publications will expose police leaders to a wider range of contemporary information and knowledge, why is the reading frequency so low? Several reasons may account for this situation. One is time: Given the range of publications available, it

**Table 6**  
**Frequency of Reading Selections**  
**(Percent of Respondents)**

	Never (0)	On Occasion	Frequently	Almost Always	Mean
Local Newspaper	4	10	15	71	2.53
TELEMASP Bulletins	11	13	22	54	2.20
The Police Chief	15	21	27	37	1.85
Law & Order	14	36	30	20	1.56
NIJ Bulletins	20	37	28	15	1.38
Non-Police Prof. Publications	15	51	26	9	1.28
B of J Assistance Bulletins	28	37	24	12	1.20
National Newspaper	19	53	21	7	1.18
Law Enforcement News	36	34	15	15	1.09
B of J Statistics Bulletins	31	42	18	10	1.06
Research Rpts. on Policing Issues	31	39	22	8	1.06
Other Police Publications	28	49	17	6	1.01
Police Magazine	44	30	18	8	.89
Community Policing Exchange	53	20	14	13	.88
Computer Publications	40	40	14	5	.84
Police Liability Review	61	22	10	6	.67
Police Mgt. & Technology	57	29	6	7	.63
American Journal of Police	67	23	6	3	.57
Police Studies	63	25	9	3	.51
Police Labor Monthly	69	19	6	6	.50
Crime Control Digest	71	14	11	3	.46

simply is not feasible to read all of the publications. A second reason is value or need: A police executive with trusted assistance for the agency's information services has limited need to read computer publications. Similarly, if a police agency has a legal advisor or lawyer on retainer to assist in liability matters, there is limited need for the chief to read *Police Liability Reporter*.

A third reason is cost. Some of the publications are fairly expensive. A police administrator will have a limited budget for such materials and must, therefore, invest in the subscriptions wisely. This may forego use of some of the more expensive literature. A fourth reason is that while a police executive may not read these publications personally, someone—such as an administrative assistant or a planning and research unit—will regu-

larly review this material and report it in summary form to the chief. Fifth, is the phenomenon of information overload. With so many sources of information available, one can become overwhelmed, unable to effectively consume the data simply because the process of discerning that which is useful from that which is either not useful or repetitive takes more time than actually reading the information. The final reason may be that some administrators simply do not take the initiative to pursue these materials.

### **The Internet**

The amount of information available on the Internet has grown exponentially both in terms of quality and quantity. There are currently over 2,000 law enforcement sites on the Web globally with many

NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFERENCE SERVICE  
<http://www.ncjrs.org>  
 CECIL GREEK'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE LINKS  
<http://www.fsu.edu/~crimdo/>  
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 THE POLICE OFFICER'S INTERNET DIRECTORY  
<http://www.officer.com>  
 LAW ENFORCEMENT SITES ON THE WEB  
<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1814/ira.html>

**Figure 1**

**Internet Sources of Police-Related Information**  
 (For a complete listing, see *TELEMASP*, November 1996.)

others specializing in research, law, and a range of specialized topics. For example, the Internet sites listed in Figure 1 can link the user to an extraordinary breadth of information, much of which will be useful for administrative decision making.

While information available through the Internet is easily and quickly accessible—and generally free—it can also become overwhelming. With experience and a focused plan of knowing the types of information which are needed and a systematic method of searching, sources on the Internet can be a significant benefit for administrators seeking information. Table 7 summarizes responses regarding use of computerized resources.

**The Bottom Line**

Based on the survey results, Texas police executives are aware of the various organizations and publications available to them to gain information for executive decision making. Despite this awareness, many of the professional resources are infrequently used. Perhaps this is a reflection of personal priority and interests. Further, the most important information which affects police administrators on a daily basis is in their own com-

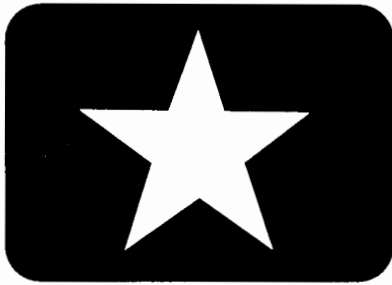
**Table 7**

**Computer Utilization  
(Percent of Respondents)**

Possess Home Computer	70
Use Online Commercial Service at Home	23
Use Online Commercial Service at Office	18
Use E-mail at Office	47
Use E-mail at Home	16
Use Internet	30

munity. Certainly, this is both understandable and reasonable. Locally accessible information is also easier to obtain.

Despite this, police administrators are under-utilizing a great deal of valuable policy information produced by research and experimentation. Historically, much of this information has been cumbersome to identify and obtain. However, with the geometric growth of research availability on the Internet in an easily searchable and retrievable form, perhaps this will change.



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Randy Garner, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

Kay Billingsley  
Publications Manager

For information about LEMIT  
programs, call (409) 294-1669

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Larry T. Hoover, Ph.D., Director  
Jamie L. Tillerson, Program Manager

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This bulletin was authored by Dr. David Carter of Michigan State University and Dr. Larry Hoover of SHSU. Dr. Carter is the director of the National Center for Community Policing at MSU and teaches in LEMIT's Executive Issues and GMI programs. Dr. Hoover directs SHSU's Police Research Center.



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**Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement  
Management Institute of Texas**  
Criminal Justice Center  
Sam Houston State University  
Huntsville, TX 77341-2296

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