

San Antonio Police Department



The City of San Antonio, located in south-central Texas, is home to approximately 1.4 million residents making it the second most populated city in Texas. It covers 465 square miles and is the seventh most populated city in the United States with roughly 32 million tourists arriving every year. The 80 miles that separate San Antonio and Austin is, one day, expected to form a new metroplex similar to the one in Dallas and Fort Worth. The Alamo, Riverwalk, SeaWorld and the Tower of Americas are just some of the places that help make San Antonio so inviting.

The San Antonio Police Department was formed in 1846. Over the last 176 years, it has grown to include 2,352 sworn police officers and 983 civilian members. Each year, SAPD receives approximately 2.2 million emergency and non-emergency calls for service. In 2016, SAPD was recognized by the 21st Century Policing Task Force for being at the national forefront in several areas including Community Policing, Officer Training and Officer Wellness. The department and its members strive to instill a spirit of togetherness and support from the San Antonio community. We take our core values of integrity, respect, compassion and fairness to heart and will continue to work towards achieving excellence within our great department and beyond.

SOU Training Initiative and Coordinated Response Summary

In the last quarter of 2020, the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) conducted administrative reviews of line officer's tactical decision making and determined additional tactical training would be beneficial. The Training Academy has historically been the primary source of tactical training for the Department. However, COVID and the emphasis on training cadets had stretched the Academy resources. When considering innovative solutions to this issue, the Department turned to the Special Operations Unit (SOU).

SOU is comprised of SWAT, K-9, Hostage Negotiators and Bomb Squad. The SWAT team has 25 operators, most of whom are certified by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement as

instructors because of the frequent team training. Not only are the SWAT officers' competent instructors, they are also the subject matter experts in police tactics.

SWAT had recently experienced a decrease in workload due to various changes occurring during 2020. As a result, SOU was identified as having additional capacity to further the Department's mission in other ways. Utilizing SOU to provide tactical training would benefit the officers and would also hone the skills of the operators as well. Furthermore, the SWAT work schedule was such that with some slight flexing in their schedule they could contact all the patrol shifts during their normal working hours thus there would be no overtime expense.

The SAPD Patrol Division is comprised of 6 *substations*, and each station has 4 patrol *shifts*. Each patrol shift has 3 *details*. Additionally, each substation has a community services detail which had a flexible work schedule. Each station has approximately 200 – 250 uniformed personnel with a total of 13 details of uniformed officers.

With the significant number of officers to train and only 25 operators as instructors, an innovative training schedule would need to be created. The Department had to identify how officers could be taken offline for training, but without incurring additional personnel costs while at the same time leaving patrol with sufficient staff to conduct daily operations. To further complicate matters, the Department needed to work around issues in the Collective Bargaining Agreement which restricted the number of hours a year the Department could alter an officer's work schedule.

The Department began by first meeting with patrol supervisors to explain the vision and objectives of the "SOU Training Initiative". Approximately 140 patrol supervisors were consulted and offered an opportunity to provide feedback regarding the effort. The Department also contacted representatives from the Police Officers Association to discuss the initiative as well. The intent of the various meetings was to increase engagement and buy-in from all the stakeholders involved.

After several round-table meetings with patrol, the association, and the Training Academy, a collaborative plan was developed which would allow SOU to provide monthly training to patrol on various operational topics of interest. The plan minimized staffing issues to patrol, did not conflict with any collective bargaining provisions, and did not incur any additional personnel costs.

Unlike past practice, this training would take place at the officer's duty station and during the officer's normal duty hours. After roll call, one of the three details would remain behind and receive training while the other two details responded to calls for service. After the first detail completed training, the second detail would come in from the field for their training and the first detail would take their place responding to calls. The training rotated in this manner until all three details were trained.

The training days were communicated in advance, and the community services detail would also flex their schedule and be called in during the training times for that day to augment call response and to receive the training themselves. As structured, the training would take SOU an entire shift to complete one patrol shift. These training days were held twice a month, on different days of the week, to account for officers who were on relief day or other forms of leave when the other training day occurred. The training was documented, and in some cases the training was reported to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) so officers would get credit for the training hours. Not all the monthly training met the criteria for TCOLE, but it had importance for the Department.

With 6 stations having 4 shifts each, there are 24 specific units. SOU has 25 instructors. The SOU instructors were divided into 12 teams, and each team was assigned to two patrol units. For instance, one SOU instructor team would be responsible for teaching “North Patrol A shift” and “North Patrol B shift” every month. Each SOU instructor team acted as a liaison to their assigned units and assisted with scheduling.

Maintaining consistency of SOU instructors teaching the same unit(s) was beneficial because it allowed the instructors to better understand the shift dynamics, training needs, and skill sets on the shift. This also gave the SOU instructors ownership and accountability of their assigned shifts, and the ability to build relationships and cohesion with the shifts they trained.

After a few short months of planning and preparation, and after consultation between the Academy and SOU commanders, the SOU Training Initiative began in January of 2021. While there was the usual scrutiny which comes anytime change occurs in a police department, the initiative was welcomed by officers who valued the training. Overwhelmingly, the critiques received stated that the training was appreciated and to “keep it coming”. The SOU instructors also were well received since the officers understood and respected their skills and experience. The SOU instructors received a lot of positive feedback which increased their buy-in and motivation to continue.

The initiative has several benefits. The easiest benefit to quantify is the increase in tactical training hours being received. In a typical year officers would get 4 – 8 hours of tactics training during their annual in-service block. By conducting even just an hour per officer per month, the SOU Training Initiative tripled the number of tactical training hours typically received in a year.

Furthermore, as anyone familiar with tactics can attest, they are a diminishing skill set. Instead of focusing on tactics for one day out of the year, the department was now discussing tactics every month. The increased frequency of training helps to preserve tactical skills and prevents complacency.

Another benefit of the initiative was that officers were now training with their co-workers and supervisors. The typical annual in-service class consists of officers from all over the department coming together at the Academy for training. Oftentimes officers would train tactics with officers they did not know and may never work with. By conducting the training at the substation and

with individual details, officers were allowed to train with the same officers and supervisors they would work with in the field. This enhanced understanding and familiarity between officers on the shift and improved group cohesion as well.

Another noticeable benefit from the Department’s perspective was the flexibility and agility with which the Department could respond to identified training needs. Using the in-service model, it would take the department a full calendar year to train officers in a particular topic. This means any training needs identified during the year would often have to be worked into the in-service schedule for the following year.

By having monthly training, it allowed the department to train on topics which may be identified month to month. For instance, Texas made a legislative change which required officers to provide medical care to persons they encounter during their course of duty. Knowing the change was going to be in effect on September 1st, 2021, the department shifted priorities and had the Department’s Tactical Medic program provide the “Stop the Bleed” training course to all officers to ensure they had the skills and confidence needed to comply with the new legislation.

While there were some months where training was postponed due to operational needs or a COVID spike, there were many valuable topics covered which include: Critical Incident Response, Tactical Shield, Stop the Bleed, De-escalation, Strategic Disengagement, After-Action reviews, Team Movements, and the Coordinated Response Protocol. By the end of the year, the department vastly expanded the number of training hours provided to officers in a calendar year. As a direct result of the training initiative, the Department had an additional 152 reported training sessions, which were attended by over 4,000 officers, and resulted in over 11,400 hours being reported to TCOLE. These quantifiable metrics more than triple what would have historically been reported in years past through In-Service training.

<u>Training Course</u>	<u>Training Sessions</u>	<u>Officers Trained</u>	<u>Training Hours Reported</u>
Coordinated Response	36	1,460	5,840
Roll Call Training	109	2,516	5,174
Supervisors	7	205	420
Total	152	4,181	11,434

Coordinated Response Protocol

While the SOU Training Initiative was a huge step towards improving officer safety through training and development, the Department also instituted another program in 2021 called the “Coordinated Response Protocol” (CRP). The CRP was developed after the Department anecdotally identified a trend regarding officer involved shootings (OIS) both locally and across the country.

In the first half of 2021, the Department noted several OIS where multiple (3+) officers were involved, and the number of rounds discharged was higher than historical averages. The table below, while representing full years, helps demonstrate the trend being seen.

Year	Number of OIS	OIS with 3+ officers	Approximate Rounds Fired
2019	19	3	127
2020	18	2	199
2021	14	6	265

Concerned with the trend, Chief McManus directed staff to analyze the incidents for causation and determine an appropriate course of action to address the increase. After a thorough review of the OIS incidents for the past few years, it was determined the trend was due in part to a misunderstanding of what de-escalation entailed, and the sense that officers nationwide felt their conduct and force was being unfairly criticized.

Utilizing body-cam video it was observed on several occasions where officers would arrive to the scene of a volatile incident and confront a violent and potentially armed suspect by themselves. In the past, prior to de-escalation and anxiety about public scrutiny, officers confronting aggressive suspects would quickly use an appropriate amount of force which would either resolve the incident without deadly force or devolve into an OIS *prior* to other officers' arrival.

Currently, officers are still arriving to violent scenes quickly, and oftentimes by themselves, but they are now attempting to de-escalate and are hesitant to use force due to a self-identified fear of lawsuits, discipline, or potential criminal charges. This delay in taking decisive action is prolonging the encounter, and this extended time allows for more officers to arrive on scene. As a result, when a deadly threat is realized many of those present discharge their weapons.

The after-action reviews revealed that while many officers would be on scene at the same time, it was very rare for them to work effectively as a team. It was observed that each officer felt compelled to give commands, and sometimes those commands contradicted another officer's commands. For instance, one officer may order the suspect to raise his hands while another may tell the suspect to get on the ground.

It was also noted that each officer also felt the need to provide lethal cover. It was observed in several incidents nearly every officer involved either had their weapon drawn or their rifle deployed. Then officers would simultaneously perceive a deadly threat to themselves or others and would engage the actor with deadly force.

Sometimes the number of officers firing, or number of rounds discharged, could be perceived as what we labeled as sympathetic fire or cascading fire. Studies have shown that when multiple officers fire there is the propensity to fire more rounds than likely would have occurred had the officer been alone. It was noted that even those officers who were in a less advantageous position

or who were further away still discharged their weapon even though the chances of accurate fire had diminished.

To address these issues, additional tactics training was discussed. However, individual tactics would not prevent these instances from occurring since officers were already acting as individuals. Stress inoculation training was also debated; however, stress training requires a lot of time and resources which most departments simply can't spare the time and funding required to get officers to the point where stress isn't a significant factor in their response.

Increased supervision was considered as a solution, with the idea being a supervisor could help facilitate teamwork. However, many times incidents unfold prior to a supervisor being able to arrive. Even if a supervisor was on scene when things devolved it often happens so dynamically that officers find themselves in a reactive position and at a disadvantage. Furthermore, effective communication during high stress and dynamic incidents is very difficult to achieve.

While tactics training is valuable, there would need to be a component of teamwork involved. Officers are trained to be able to handle incidents on their own. Being self-sufficient is a vital ability to have in cases where the officer is alone. Most calls can be handled with a single officer, and this becomes the norm. As a result, officers have become accustomed to working in an individual capacity. While the SWAT team is used to working in tandem with each other and sharing roles and assignments, patrol officers are not.

While reviewing incidents, it was observed that if officers would have slowed their initial response, developed a plan, and arrived organized they may have been able to work together more effectively which could have favorably impacted the result. Understanding this, the department set out to develop policy guidelines and a training curriculum which would help officers better coordinate and plan their response. The result was the Coordinated Response Protocol.

The foundation of the CRP revolves around dispersed leadership and teamwork. Because supervisors cannot be present in every situation, individual officers must recognize the need for leadership and take on the role of Incident Commander (IC) when appropriate. Likewise, other officers must acknowledge the role of the IC and be receptive to direction and taking a role as a team member.

In CRP, the IC's role is to assess available details and determine if a coordinated response was viable or if an immediate and direct response was necessary. This determination is made based on whether there appears to be exigent circumstances. For example, if a caller indicated she was assaulted by her spouse, but she left the house and the spouse was now home alone, then absent other details there would be time to coordinate a response prior to arrival. Conversely, if the caller stated she had been assaulted and was now cowering in the bathroom then officers would be expected to respond directly and immediately.

The Department understands police encounters and calls for service are dynamic and can change quickly. What may initially appear to be a call suitable for coordinated response may change to a direct response based on new information. Likewise, a call which necessitates an immediate response may change to one which allows for coordination. CRP is based on using available information, not conjecture, when making determinations regarding response type.

At the onset, Officers were concerned there could be disciplinary implications related to the initial decision making. The Department explained that, as with any other decision, officers were only expected to rely on training, experience, and reasonableness when making an assessment. Like any other situation, officers are held to the “objectively reasonable” standard. Officers were instructed they should be able to articulate the rationale for their decision and they would not be held accountable for things which were reasonably outside of their control or knowledge.

Regarding how the IC was selected, it was determined the primary officer with responsibility for the call would be the IC by default. An officer with report responsibility could pass the role of IC to another officer if the other officer was more suited for the role due to training, experience, or actionable intelligence involving the situation. For instance, if an officer receives a call for family violence, but one of the cover officers is familiar with the actor due to handling previous calls at the location, then the officer with more knowledge may be better suited to develop the response plan and could take on the duties of the IC.

Contrary to what many may think, most calls do not contain exigency which requires an immediate and direct response by an individual officer. Thus, the CRP is more often the appropriate response. A pattern of calls could be seen regarding calls for service. Typically, a violent act occurred which prompted the police to be called, then there was a lull in violence which did not begin again until the arrival of police. This lull in the violence affords officers some time to coordinate their approach instead of hastily responding in a reactive manner.

If it was determined by the IC that CRP was the appropriate response, the next step was to identify a staging area nearby the location and have all responding officers rally at that point. Once officers were staged, roles would be assigned based on call details and available resources. If an actor was said to be violent then more officers should be summoned before the initial officers arrived. Similarly, if an actor was said to be armed then the IC may want to call for a shield or a rifleman to respond as well.

While there could be many roles, there were a few roles which would be needed regardless of the call. The one role which always had to be filled would be the determination of which officer would control verbal communications. Simply identifying which officer would provide verbal commands prior to arrival would be a significant benefit and help reduce confusion.

CRP seeks to assign officers to roles based on the scientifically proven fact that the more an officer’s attention is divided the more difficult any one task becomes. Instead of each officer acting as if they were responsible for verbal commands, lethal cover, and less-than-lethal force; the IC should assign those roles to a specific officer who could concentrate primarily on one role

and thus do a better job of fulfilling the duties associated with that role, which is how officers on a SWAT team operate. By each officer having a role and using teamwork, the team would benefit and ultimately be more effective.

Now that officers have staged, assigned roles, and a plan is developed the officers would then proceed to the call better prepared. While the CRP process may sound time consuming, the CRP training showed it could be done very quickly. Officers were trained that the amount of time spent coordinating directly related to the details which were available. Furthermore, if officers felt the need to respond quickly then most of the coordination could be done over the radio while enroute.

In early conversations with patrol supervisors, the idea of CRP was met with much scrutiny. One of the barriers to the CRP was the culture of the police profession itself. Historically, rapid response time is the expectation and the notion of slowing down to assess is construed as timidity. Furthermore, it was also perceived that the idea of CRP was the administration's way of micromanaging officers and opening them up for discipline. Recognizing the perceptions and culture of patrol, the CRP Training Team understood how important it would be for the training to provide clear direction and irrefutable evidence of the value of the change.

To create the CRP training material the Department took the uncommon step of allowing body camera video footage from previous OIS to be shown, illustrating the teaching points. The training team, comprised of subject matter experts in the field of tactics, combed through video footage from local and national police incidents and identified clips which had significant training value. The use of department video was very well received, and it allowed the officers to relate to the material in a way that they had not been able to do when watching video from other agencies.

The training team also compiled information related to auditory exclusion, tunnel vision, and sympathetic response as these are normal responses to stress which can be reduced through coordination efforts. To highlight the importance of assigning roles, the team included scientific evidence which showed the impact of trying to multitask in a dynamic situation. Lastly, the team identified compelling video from real police encounters which showed the value of coordination and teamwork and how it improved officer safety.

The training material was combined into a logical format which led officers through the rationale and benefits of CRP. It was determined the course could be completed in a 4-hour block, and several initial training dates were set. The first few training sessions were held in August 2021 and the reaction from patrol was overwhelmingly supportive. As a result of the positive response the training received, the Department decided to expedite training the entire department and the training team was instructed to increase training significantly more than anticipated.

To accommodate the increased training request, the original training team conducted several train-the-trainer sessions and expanded the instructor cadre. CRP sessions were put on 4 times a day every weekend in September, and then several days during the week in the month of

October. The positive response got attention from other units outside of patrol, and personnel from investigations and administrative units also requested to attend. When space allowed, outside agencies in the area were invited to attend and they too had a positive response to the training.

The overall intent of the training was to increase officer safety. While officer safety is difficult to quantify, some metrics which are measurable and have a nexus to officer safety include the number of officer involved shootings, the number of officers involved in each shooting, the number of rounds discharged, the number of injured officer reports made as a result of responding to calls, and the number of assault on police officer reports which are made.

Since CRP is relatively new and we do not have a large data sample from which to draw conclusions or measure success. However, initial indicators are positive. Prior to the training the department was averaging one multiple-officer-involved (3+ officers) shooting every 5 weeks in 2021. Since the training, there have not been any multiple-officer-involved shootings in the last 23 weeks. The table below represents metrics before and after the training was conducted.

OIS Metrics

2021	Average Officer involved per Incident	Average rounds discharged per incident	Average of rounds discharged per officer per incident
Pre CRP Training	3.1	23	13
Post CRP Training	1.8	7	4

Officers Assaulted

2021	Officers Assaulted Avg per week	Officers injured Avg per week
Pre CRP Training	7.1	2.1
Post CRP Training	5.1	1.6

In conclusion, the programs initiated by the Department in 2021 have clearly had a positive effect on officer and public safety. These innovative programs were instituted with minimal impact to budget and no discernable negative impact to operations. The metrics and critiques indicate the efforts related to the Coordinated Response Protocol and the SOU Training Initiative have been well received by and have undoubtedly enhanced officer safety.