

# Considerations for Specialized Units

Checklists for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies to Ensure Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Accountability

National Policing Institute  
National Law Enforcement Knowledge Lab



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## CHECKLIST #1

# Corresponding Chapter: Forming a Specialized Unit

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT CHAPTER 1](#)

This checklist has been developed to assist law enforcement agencies in the process of considering and forming a specialized unit. The following checklist items are complemented by Chapter 1 of the COPS Office's report: [Considerations for Specialized Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies to Ensure Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Accountability](#).

- The nature of the public safety problem to be addressed by the proposed specialized unit has been analyzed and is well understood.
- The problem has been specifically defined and differentiated from other related issues.
- The definition of the problem has been informed by data and perspectives from within and outside the agency—including impacted communities.
- Alternatives to creating a specialized unit have been considered.
- Alternative responses to the problem, including those outside of or beyond law enforcement, have been considered.
- It has been determined that normal patrol functions and resources cannot address the problem, and the reasons for this are documented.
- The specialized unit's specific purpose, scope, tasks, and supporting analysis have been identified and documented in writing.
- The unit's operational period or the timeframe for re-evaluating its need has been defined (e.g., 6 months, 1 year, etc.). A specialized unit that is intended to be permanent should be further justified, and a regular timeline for re-evaluating the decision to maintain the unit has been identified in writing.
- The specialized unit's approach and branding are consistent with the unit's mission and the agency's culture.
- Clear lines of reporting authority have been identified for the unit.
- The complexity of the unit's functions, operations, and risks were all considered when planning its supervision. Supervisory levels are commensurate with complexity and risk.
- The physical location of the unit has been considered, as well as the need for communication, oversight, and collaboration with other units.
- Consideration has been given as to whether additional or modified policies, procedures, or training are necessary as the specialized unit is created and implemented.
- Criteria for evaluating the implementation and progress of the unit (including thresholds for continuing and discontinuing the unit) have been identified and shared within the agency and the community. Progress evaluations will be conducted at regular intervals and results will be shared with the community.



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## CHECKLIST #2

# Corresponding Chapter: Selection and Supervision of Specialized Units

This checklist has been developed to assist law enforcement agencies in the process of considering and forming a specialized unit. The following checklist items are complemented by Chapter 2 of the COPS Office's report: *Considerations for Specialized Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies to Ensure Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Accountability*.

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT CHAPTER 2](#)

- The role of first-line supervisors overseeing the unit is well-defined. The standard personnel supervision tasks and management responsibilities are clear, including advocating for the unit's needs related to training and other resources, risk management, and the ability to ensure continuous improvement.
- The supervisory span of control has been objectively evaluated. Consideration has been given to the complexity and sensitivity of the problem(s) being addressed by the unit, as well as the intricacy and risk levels associated with the tasks, operations, and tactics.
- The selection criteria for unit supervisor(s) include the consideration of each candidate's ability to create and sustain a healthy unit culture consistent with the agency's culture, support the mission, purpose, and goals of the unit, and maintain a risk-management mindset.
- The criteria for selection and the selection process:
  - have been shared within the agency transparently and are based on clearly defined eligibility measures;
  - consider how well applicants or candidates can balance proactive policing with the unit's goals and mission;
  - assess the performance history of the candidates, including use of force and complaint histories and past interactions with juveniles and specific populations, including victims, persons in crisis, and those dealing with substance use disorders, etc.; and
  - consider the demographic (race, ethnicity, gender) and experience (training, assignments, languages, etc.) diversity of the unit and how it can improve capabilities and shape the unit's culture.
- A determination has been made regarding who will make personnel selection decisions. Input from the unit supervisor(s) and those outside the unit's supervision or chain of command is encouraged.
- A decision on staff rotational procedures or the duration of assignment to the unit has been made, and the agency's size, unit size, collective bargaining agreements, and the type of training and expertise required have been considered.



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## CHECKLIST #3

# Corresponding Chapter: Management and Accountability of Specialized Units

This checklist has been developed to assist law enforcement agencies in the process of considering and forming a specialized unit. The following checklist items are complemented by Chapter 3 of the COPS Office's report: *Considerations for Specialized Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies to Ensure Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Accountability*.

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT CHAPTER 3](#)

- The overall criteria upon which the unit will be evaluated are clearly defined, consistent with, and linked to the unit's mission, purpose, and goals.
- Performance criteria or metrics that will be used to measure the unit's (team and individual officer) performance include a mix of statistical and non-statistical (e.g., supervisory observations related to teamwork, community interactions, etc.) data.
- The statistical metrics used to measure performance should be chosen carefully and not simply used because they are available. Metrics should be connected to outcomes in the community as much as possible.
- Performance criteria for assessing the unit should include metrics on how (by what means) the unit is achieving its mission to ensure that the costs do not outweigh the benefits of success.
- Supervisors' roles in the chain of command include continuous performance reviews at the unit and individual officer levels.
- Data required to inform the assessment of the unit's and officers' performances has been identified, and collection processes are in place to ensure data availability.
- A process for assessing or "auditing" the unit's activities and outcomes has been established and includes a timeline for regular assessments and/or "audits," as well as who is responsible for leading the assessments.
- The possible risks associated with the specialized unit and its operations have been proactively identified and considered throughout its formation, personnel and supervision selection, and performance and accountability management.
- Risk management priorities and functions have been addressed in policy, training, and/or supervisory functions. They address managing the risks of litigation, negative community impacts, potential rights violations, and the safety and wellness of officers and the community.



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## CHECKLIST #4

# Corresponding Chapter: Community Engagement

This checklist has been developed to assist law enforcement agencies in the process of considering and forming a specialized unit. The following checklist items are complemented by Chapter 4 of the COPS Office's report: *Considerations for Specialized Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies to Ensure Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Accountability*.

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT CHAPTER 4](#)

- Community briefing(s) are scheduled to inform citizens of the problem, how it is affecting the community, and who specifically is impacted. As a part of these briefings, the community will be made aware of:
  - the nature and impact of the problem, using data and information from the community;
  - the alternatives considered by the agency;
  - the reasons why a specialized unit is necessary;
  - the mission, purpose, and goals of the specialized unit;
  - how the unit will function, including what it will not do; and
  - how the unit will be supervised, held accountable, and reassessed at various intervals.
- The agenda for the community briefing(s) includes an opportunity to solicit the community's views and insights into the problem, its possible causes and solutions, and how the specialized unit's performance in addressing the problem should be considered.
- A timeline for unit performance review and future community briefings has been established.
- A plan for conducting continuous community engagement—particularly in areas where the unit is expected to operate or has operated—has been developed and includes intentional and non-traditional collection methods as described in the full guide (pages 39-40).
- A plan has been established to ensure that voices not typically represented or involved in traditional law enforcement outreach are heard. The plan includes a variety of diverse outreach methods, such as contacting community advocacy groups or intermediaries.
- A communications plan has been established to share information about the unit's work and progress and to address community concerns (particularly following an incident).





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