



COPS Fact Sheet

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COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Tips for Ensuring Successful Technology Implementation

"GOOD STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT ARE THE MOST ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS IN HELPING POLICE DEPARTMENTS SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENT CRIME FIGHTING TECHNOLOGY."

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Strategic planning is an essential component of any successful information technology project. In conjunction with SEARCH, The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics, COPS identified ten critical success factors related to strategic planning for law enforcement technology initiatives funded by COPS grants. They are:

1. Create a Governance Structure: As an initial project planning step, we recommend that agencies develop a "project chain of command" that facilitates decision-making and general project management. Ideally, the governance structure would include:

Project Sponsor: Typically the chief or sheriff, this person sets the project's vision and is responsible for maintaining executive leadership and support.

Steering Committee: A small group of executives responsible for providing adequate direction, support and resource allocation.

Project Manager: A single individual responsible for acting as the primary point of contact for all aspects of the project.

Subject Matter Experts: Individuals who provide expertise on specific topics.

2. Incorporate Knowledgeable Staff: Historically, police agencies have not required the employment of specifically trained technology project managers. Consequently, most COPS funded technology projects have been overseen by sworn personnel who must learn technical project management through trial and error. Grant recipients are encouraged to analyze existing human resources at the onset of the project and provide either training to existing staff or consider outsourcing various project tasks (i.e., consulting or hiring full-time staff).

3. Avoid Scope Creep: Scope Creep can be defined as an uncontrolled shift in defined project objectives causing the boundaries of a project's vision to expand beyond the project's budget and resources. Successful initiatives define a project's scope and then maintain watch and control over all related changes.

4. Forecast Realistic Timelines: Successful grantees rely upon accurate and reasonable timelines for implementing their technology initiatives. The absence of realistic timelines or the reliance upon vendor-provided data can lead to false hopes, a perceived lack of progress and a loss of resources, both financial and human. Agencies can contact COPS for potential referrals to other COPS grant recipients to learn more about defining a realistic project timeline.

COPS offers a variety of publications, products, and training opportunities to advance community policing and support its grant programs. COPS publications and products offer insights and experiences from others in the field addressing specific problems including:

- ✓ Law Enforcement Tech Guide
- ✓ Law Enforcement Tech Guide for Small and Rural Agencies
- ✓ Information Systems Technology Enhancement Project (ISTEP)
- ✓ Call Management and Community Policing: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement
- ✓ User's Guide to Mapping Software

SEARCH, The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics, is a private, nonprofit organization that assists local, tribal, county, regional, and state justice and public safety agencies in improving the quality of justice and public safety. Its focus is on criminal history and information-sharing systems, information technology planning and implementation, communications interoperability, and cybercrime investigation. Services include expert technical assistance and training, resource development, public policy assistance, and model development.

5. Develop Accurate Project Budgets:

Grantees should forecast project budgets based upon known information, including both one-time and recurring costs. Failure to properly forecast these costs can result in lengthy project delays or the cancellation of an entire project. Recognizing that not all costs are known at a project's onset, new grantees should investigate previous like-initiatives (i.e., contact your vendor's references and inquire about one-time and recurring costs).

6. Conduct a Comprehensive

Procurement: Conducting a competitive procurement may be the most critical factor in successful grant funded initiatives. Competitive procurement forces the vendors to compete on three levels: pricing, functionality, and willingness to negotiate a favorable contract. Assembling a detailed request for proposal (RFP) that includes functional specifications and questions about the vendor's capabilities and past performance enables agencies to make decisions based on objective and pre-determined criteria.

7. Employ Quality Control Measures:

Related to procurement is the issue of quality management once the system is installed. Agencies often rely upon the vendor's response to the functional specification section of their RFP when determining whether the system is operating as promised. Developing and executing proper acceptance tests and criteria is the only method of determining the quality of the vendor's solution.

8. Develop a Communications Plan: To ensure the availability of project resources as well as maintain project support, agencies are encouraged to develop an effective method for communicating the project's status, performance, changes in scope and, ultimately, lessons learned. One effective method is the development and maintenance of a dedicated project website that includes discussion forums, related project documents, schedules, and resources.

9. Conduct Risk Management: Many agencies fail to consider the risks involved with implementing any large-scale technology project. As a result, there often is no back-up plan in place to handle unexpected issues. This leaves agencies unprepared when parts of the project do not work out as originally anticipated. Risk management can include cost overruns, project delays, system failures, integration issues, etc. It is suggested that new grantees need to envision all possible risks, regardless of how seemingly insignificant, and develop measures to address these potential events. Proper risk management ensures a proactive response to project issues, rather than merely reacting to change.

10. Prepare for Complex Integration:

Agencies should envision how their proposed technology will interact with internal and external computer systems including databases and networks. System interfaces are one of the most complex aspects of any technology initiative and consume a substantial percentage of project costs. Agencies must carefully develop interface requirements and closely monitor the vendor's performance in this area during implementation.

Incorporating these ten concepts will increase the likelihood that your technology initiative will be a success. Both the COPS Office and SEARCH have additional information regarding strategic planning and technical assistance, including advice from previous COPS grant recipients. For additional information on technology implementation, you can visit the SEARCH web site at www.search.org. You can also contact the COPS Office Response Center at 800.421.6770 and visit COPS Online at www.cops.usdoj.gov.