



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County

Program Title: Prince William County Co-Responder Unit

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher E. Martino

Title: Prince William County Executive

Signature:

2021 VACo Achievement Awards

Program Name: Prince William County Co-Responder Unit

Award Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Department: Prince William County Police Department

Jurisdiction: Prince William County, Virginia

Executive Summary / Brief Overview

The Prince William County Co-Responder Unit is a joint collaborative effort between the Prince William County Police Department and Prince William County Community Services. It is comprised of three of police officers and three mental health clinicians who respond together as teams to calls for service involving individuals in crisis. Utilizing a team approach between the Police Department and Community Services allows us to meet the person in crisis in the community where they are most comfortable, feel secure and can maintain their dignity. The Unit utilizes crisis intervention techniques and other problem-solving skills to de-escalate situations and develop resolutions that are in the best interest of individuals in crisis as well as the community. In addition, the Unit has a proactive component where they conduct outreach requests and home visits involving 911 high-utilizers, other persons in varying degrees of crisis, and individuals the Unit believes would benefit from further contact. When conducting the outreach requests, the Co-Responder Unit follows up with the individual in crisis, family members and caregivers to reduce the likelihood of further crisis situations by offering the appropriate resources or community services to encourage treatment engagement. The goal of the Unit is to utilize de-escalation techniques and divert individuals in crisis away from emergency custody or arrest, as well as emergency rooms, when those options would otherwise be appropriate. By utilizing these skills, we hope to put individuals in crisis in touch with community resources and reduce the recidivism of police contact. If those two goals can be met, we will ultimately do what is best for the consumer and reduce the amount of time officers spend on these types of calls for service.

Problem or Need for the Program

Over the last several years, it was determined that patrol officers have been spending a significant amount of time on calls for service involving persons in crisis, and this total amount of time continues to increase year after year. The activities that make up the time spent on these calls consists of handling the specific calls for service, emergency custody order processing, sitting with the person in crisis at the hospital while they are in custody, and transporting the consumer to a mental health hospital on a Temporary Detention Order. There have been numerous situations in which the Police Department maintained custody of the individual while in the emergency room at a local hospital for several days on a temporary detention order. The concerns regarding the time spent on these calls prompted the Police Department and Community Services to look more in depth into the entire process for handling persons in crisis. It was learned that while calls were being handled well, some modifications could be made to improve the process. One key item was a need to develop a specialized program between the Police Department and Community Services who could respond as a team to situations in the field involving persons in crisis. This solves another need by allowing Community Services to meet the person in crisis at their residence or where the crisis is occurring. In most cases, this location will be where the individual feels most comfortable and will increase the possibility of diversion. It also helps maintain the individual's integrity and reduces the stigma associated by decreasing the possibility of custody and being transported from one location to another.

Description of the Program

The Co-Responder Unit is a joint collaborative effort between the Prince William Police Department and Prince William County Community Services. It is comprised of three police officers from the Police Department and three clinicians from Community Services who respond as a team to calls for service involving persons in crisis. The Unit also includes a Police Department Supervisor and a Community Services Supervisor. The officers and clinicians respond as a team with the objective to de-escalate situations involving persons in crisis. An objective of the team is to avoid emergency custody, when appropriate, by offering the appropriate resources and/or community services. While accomplishing this objective, the Co-Responder Unit is then meeting the objective of decreasing the amount of time that officers are required to spend on these types of calls for service. An additional objective is to reduce the recidivism of persons in crisis with the Police Department which will lessen the chances of a negative interaction with the Police Department.

The need for a Co-Responder program was brought to the attention of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors in February 2020. The creation of the Co-Responder Unit was discussed and approved by the Board of County Supervisors during the budget process for fiscal year 2021 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021). After the budget was passed, the Police Department and Community Services worked collaboratively to create a “Co-Responder Development Committee.” The committee was created to develop a memorandum of understanding between the two agencies, standard operating procedures, schedule, vacancy announcements, training requirements, and all other items needed for the creation of a new unit. Over the next several months, the committee collaborated on these topics and many more to develop the framework that was needed to start the Co-Responder Unit and select its inaugural members. The inaugural officers and clinicians of the Co-Responder Unit attended a mandatory two-day

training session on December 3-4, 2020. The official start date of the Co-Responder Unit was December 7, 2020.

To be considered for the Co-Responder Unit, the member (police officer and clinician) must have successfully completed the Department's existing 40-hour Crisis Intervention Team training. The Prince William County Police Department, with the assistance of the "Greater Prince William Crisis Intervention Team" and additional community stakeholders, have hosted 27 training sessions since November 2013. The training teaches de-escalation techniques and the fundamentals of dealing with a person in varying forms of crisis. It also discusses resources that can be offered to an individual during a variety of crisis situations. In addition to the 40-hour Crisis Intervention Team training, the clinicians need a Master's level degree or higher. Officers are considered on the basis of tenure, prior response to calls involving persons in crisis, additional training, and desire. The three teams work 10-hour days with the following schedule: Team 1 works Tuesday – Friday (0800 – 1800), Team 2 works Monday – Thursday (1000 – 2000), and Team 3 works Monday – Thursday (1200-2200).

The primary function of the Co-Responder Unit is to respond to calls for service involving persons in crisis. The Co-Responder Unit defines a person in crisis as a person who is experiencing an emotional disturbance, potentially related to a mental illness or other behavioral health concern, that would benefit from behavioral health crisis intervention services. The combined expertise of a clinician paired with a trained law enforcement officer has allowed the team to provide efficient and thorough coverage to persons in crisis in a timelier manner. The Co-Responder Unit has responded to crisis situations ranging from someone with a serious mental illness to a family member who just lost a loved one. Some examples of call types of calls the unit have assisted with include, but are not limited to, suicide attempts,

suicide, mental health, intellectually disabled / developmentally disabled, homicides, domestic situations, and welfare checks. If an individual calls the Public Safety Communications Center and there is an articulation of being in crisis, a Co-Responder team could be dispatched. In addition, anytime a patrol officer is on-scene and believes a Co-Responder team would be beneficial, they can request one. The Co-Responder Unit has few limitations on what they will respond to if they believe someone in crisis could use their assistance.

The secondary mission of the Co-Responder Unit is a proactive approach we call Outreach Requests. An Outreach Request is follow-up that is initiated by the Co-Responder Unit or referred to us by another law enforcement officer, Department of Fire and Rescue, Public Safety Communications Center, or Community Services. The goal of the Outreach Requests is to visit with individuals who we believe could benefit from follow-up. This serves several purposes. Some individuals just need a friendly face to sit and talk with because they are lonely, while others need to be checked on to ensure they are taking their meds and utilizing the appropriate resources that were offered to them. By taking the time to conduct Outreach Requests, we are showing the individual that someone cares and also trying to prevent a crisis before it occurs.

The Co-Responder Unit has a strong relationship with numerous community resources and offers them on a regular basis. The following are the primary resources:

- SERVE (Homeless Shelter and Food Pantry)
- Action in Community Through Service (ACTS)
- REACH (ID/DD – Intellectually Disabled / Developmentally Disabled)
- Community Services

- Get on Track Program
- Homeless Outreach / PATH
- SOAR (Substance Disorders Peer Program)
- CR2 (Children's Mobile Crisis ages 5-21)
- Virginia Veteran and Family Support Services
- Prince William County Sheriff's Office – Alzheimer's / Project Lifesaver
- National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Trillium Drop-In Center
- Various regional mental health hospitals

The primary role of the Police Department on the Co-Responder Unit is to ensure the safety of the clinician. Once the scene is deemed safe, the officer turns the situation over to the clinician as soon as possible. The officer will stay close for safety purposes but tries to take a step back to ensure the clinician and person in crisis can communicate freely and without distraction. Depending on how the call is dispatched, the officer and clinician may approach and make contact together. The officers have the training and skillset to communicate with the person in crisis, but we recognize there is a better chance for a positive outcome if the clinician can communicate directly with the person in crisis where they are at. The primary role of the clinician is to triage the crisis by means of building initial rapport to de-escalate the individual. This helps the clinician better understand the crisis and what the individual is going through or experiencing in order to make the best clinical decision for the needs of the individual. The outcomes could range from offering a referral to a community resource, voluntary hospitalization, or emergency custody. The goal is to provide immediate assistance to the person in crisis to achieve the most therapeutic result for the individual and the community.

Cost of the Program

The Prince William County Board of Supervisors approved \$900,000 in the budget for fiscal year 2021 for the creation of the Co-Responder Unit. For Community Services, this included three mental health clinician positions and a mental health clinician supervisor. For the Police Department, this included three officer positions. The approved budget covered salary, equipment needs, and other startup costs. The equipment needs included, but were not limited to, computers, clothing, police cruisers, and other miscellaneous equipment.

Results of the Program

We have seen positive progress in working to achieve our stated goals. We have been able to reduce the amount of time officers are spending on calls for service while getting persons in crisis the appropriate resources they need. Data from January and February 2021:

Co-Responder Unit	Jan & Feb (2021)
Number of Calls for Service	138
Time on Calls for Service	191 hours
Number of Outreach Requests	18
Time on Outreach Requests	14 hours
Voluntary Transports	36
Criminal Charges Diverted	13
Criminal Arrests	2

This is just a snapshot of some of the results so far and how much time the Unit is saving patrol and spending with persons in crisis.

Worthiness of Award:

The establishment of the Co-Responder Unit was a joint collaborative effort between the Prince William County Police Department and Prince William County Community Services Board. Prince William County was not required to establish a Co-Responder Unit in response to any event or mandate made by federal or state government, however, did so proactively to provide the community, specifically persons in crisis, with a greater level of care and access to resources. The Unit was initiated by the Board of County Supervisors prior to several of the significant national events that occurred in 2020. The Co-Responder Unit provides the community with an advanced level of care by providing varying degrees of assistance and getting persons in crisis access to resources in a timely manner. The initial feedback and data support the position that the Co-Responder Unit has been received positively by the officers and the community and is viewed as a success.