Data-Driven Deployment for Law Enforcement

Real-time information helps law enforcement officials in Collier County, Florida improve response times and situational awareness

Background

Collier County is one of the largest counties in Florida, spanning more than 2,000 square miles across southwest Florida. While largely rural—the county includes parts of Everglades National Park and the Big Cypress National Preserve—its population is around 400,000, having nearly doubled in the last 25 years, and the county also hosts about two million tourists and other visitors each year. The Collier County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) serves as the primary law enforcement agency for most of the county; in 2019, the department received 440,191 calls for service.

The Need

With such a large geographical area to cover and a growing population, CCSO was looking for innovative ways to help keep up with demand. They knew that while the coastal areas of the county were busier, the rural communities to the east were also growing and still needed a certain level of coverage to ensure adequate response times. But CCSO had another problem, like law enforcement agencies across the nation, the recruitment and retention couldn't keep up with the calls.

"It was a matter of taking the existing staff we have and reallocating them to when the calls are happening," explained CCSO Commander James Cunningham.

Solution

Collier County Sheriff Kevin Rambosk directed his staff to investigate technological solutions to address these challenges.

"We need to always be forward-thinking and apply available technologies to help us in our mission to keep our community safe," Sheriff Rambosk said.

The agency wanted to make sure they made decisions based on data, and also that they had the ability to continue to evaluate and modify staffing and deployment plans as the needs of the community and the number of deputies changed. So CCSO partnered with FirstWatch, who Cunningham knew from his time as chief of North Collier Fire Rescue.

Using FirstWatch's Demand Analysis Module, Cunningham and his team were able to dig into their CAD data and easily see exactly where and when their deputies were responding to calls. They also looked at how long those calls were taking, and how many deputies were appropriate for the type of call, giving them a true picture of which neighborhoods and times really needed the most resources.

"Now all of the districts are able to see not only how many deputies they have, but how many they need," he explained. "We realized we were using our plain-clothes deputies and our special teams a lot more than we thought."

Another discovery was that some of their busiest times came at shift change—especially at 6 p.m., when the day shift was wrapping up. Many of those less emergent late afternoon calls saw longer response times as deputies completed paperwork and the night shift attended roll call briefings.

Seeing that data led to the creation of "power shifts," with deputies who might start later in the day and work eight- or ten-hour shifts. These new shifts are not necessarily the same across the county, but tailored to the specific needs and demand in each district, to create the most efficient and effective service to the community with the staffing CCSO has available.

This change presented a win-win for CCSO and its deputies—overlapping shifts meant someone was always able to respond not only to urgent calls but also less emergent, but still important, incidents. And it also created greater flexibility for deputies who had previously only had the option of working 6 am to 6 pm, or 6 pm to 6 am.

"It offered a great morale booster," Cunningham said. "Not everyone wanted to work a 12-hour day, and some positions are now Monday through Thursday, while others are Monday through Friday, for example—all thanks to Demand Analysis."

Conclusion

CCSO continues to use data to drive its staffing and deployment decisions as they continue to search for ways to serve their diverse community with limited resources.

"FirstWatch's Demand Analysis has allowed us to realistically move people to the time and place we need them most," Cunningham said. "So far it's proven to be extraordinarily effective."

Not only is this data helpful for daily real-time decisions, but the agency is able to look at historic data to make decisions about hiring, schedules, and location of stations.

*To view other case studies and watch related interviews, visit: **firstwatch.net/case-studies***

Improved Situational Awareness

In addition to using data to drive deployment strategies, Collier County Sheriff's Office has used FirstWatch to give its command staff and deputies greater insight into what's happening in their districts in real-time.

Leading up to Election Day 2020, CCSO, like many agencies across the country, was preparing for possible demonstrations or even violence at polling places. They trained a group of deputies to serve specifically as experts in laws related to polling locations—and emphasized the importance of customer service. The Sheriff also established an incident management team that created security plans for each early voting and Election Day voting site.

They also set up "triggers" in FirstWatch for each location's address, meaning any time a 9-1-1 call occurred at one of the sites, members of the IMT, and other agency leaders, received text alerts. So regardless of whether they were in their vehicles, on another call, or even in a meeting and unable to hear the radio broadcast or recognize the address, they knew within seconds.

Similarly, with school safety in mind, the staff has established "triggers" around the county's schools to provide immediate alerts to the deputies working at the schools of any development requiring a public safety response on and around their campus.

"When an agency tells me they can't spend the money on a program such as FirstWatch, I give them my opinion that they can't afford not to. FirstWatch will provide a tenfold return on investment, as it provides insight of how to most effectively utilize our best resources, our members," said Cunningham.