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# Police Department suggestion box is a force for the force

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Good ideas don't always make it to the top of an organization, but the Tulsa Police Department has a unique program to make sure that every officer's ideas are heard.

The program, called Managing Law Enforcement Initiatives, is something like a high-tech suggestion box.

Police Chief Dave Been implemented the program in January 2004, and dozens of proposals have been implemented since.

They include a Serial Rapist Task Force, a Spanish language-immersion school, a patrol rifle program and even the officers' new blue uniforms.

Capt. Travis Yates said, "This program empowers the most important aspect of our organization -- the street officer -- and permits them to not only share their ideas but develop those ideas to make the department more efficient."

Chuck Tryon of Tryon and Associates worked with the department to create the program with the goal of providing an ongoing source of new ideas.

The local company helps organizations with project management, systems analysis, systems design, software construction and software maintenance.

Yates said that before the program, officers sent their suggestions up the chain of command. But now they can send their ideas straight to the chief.

Through the program, an officer with an idea for a new project or a change in procedure can fill out a nine-question electronic form that helps the officer organize the proposal.

Any officer can access the automated system to see the suggestions and the status of the proposals.

A key to the system is the timely feedback that officers are promised, Tryon said. Been has committed to giving officers a response to their proposals within two weeks.

Yates said, "It is so rare in any organization that any employee can send the CEO a suggestion and get a response back from that CEO within a week or two."

Tryon said many companies and organizations work hard to hire smart people who are well-educated but then fail to listen to them.

Ideas can be lost in translation if they have to go through several supervisors, he said.

"By the time it gets to the top level, it is not at all what they were suggesting, and a lot of times it is attributed to someone else," Tryon said.

As for how the ideas are generated, "some of these things are just inspiration," he said. "Others are things that they (the officers) have been thinking about for a very long time."

A majority of the suggestions from officers are implemented, Yates said, although sometimes with a few changes.

Money is often the only limitation, he said.

"When they are turned down, it is often because of a budgetary or financial issue," Yates said.

Some proposals include funding suggestions, such as applying for grants.

When the program began, officers were hesitant to use it, but after a few successes, attitudes started to change, Tryon said. Since then, the number of proposals submitted has increased every year.

"In my mind," Yates said, "the MLEI process is one of the department's greatest achievements in recent history."

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## Here's a few of the ideas that made it

Some of the proposals submitted to the police chief and implemented since the Managing Law Enforcement Initiatives program began in January 2004:

### **Patrol rifle program:**

This program allows police officers to arm themselves with semiautomatic rifles when they need to match the firepower of the criminals they face on the streets.

Patrol officers who choose to participate must provide their own rifles and attend a class.

They also must qualify based on stringent shooting standards and requalify with the weapon twice a year.

### **E-alert system:**

With the ealert system, police send messages to registered users' email accounts, cell phones and fax machines.

Police can send messages about crime trends or searches for missing people or criminals to specific types of businesses or registered participants in certain ZIP codes.

### **New uniforms:**

All Tulsa police officers began wearing new blue uniforms in November 2005.

From 1953 until late 2005, they wore uniforms with green shirts and taupe - or "Army pink" - pants.

They made the change because the blue uniforms are more readily available and are standard for most municipal police departments.

### **Language training program:**

This three-phase program, funded by grant money, was proposed to increase the number of Spanish-speaking officers on the force.

The program included a 10-day language-immersion school in September 2005 at The Salvation Army's Heart O' the Hills Camp and Conference Center near Tahlequah.

### **Concerned confidential citizens program:**

Modeled after a program used by police in Lynchburg, Va., the program will involve a recruited corps of volunteers who undergo background checks and training.

They will be issued code names and numbers and will report to police on gangs, drugs and violent crimes before a crime escalates.

The idea was developed during a two-day summit held in September that focused on gangs.

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