Optimizing K-9 Deployment Strategies: A Data-Driven Approach

Deploying K-9 units effectively requires a strategic blend of data analysis, operational needs, collective bargaining adherence, and environmental considerations. Police leaders, K-9 Unit Supervisors and Police Dog Handlers should use a comprehensive framework for designing deployment/work schedules that maximize effectiveness. These recommendations are for established teams as well as those just starting a K-9 Unit. Here are some considerations determined by the USPCA Best Practices Group in 2024:

1. Data-Driven Deployment:

- Crime Patterns: Analyze crime data to identify peak hours and locations for incidents that could benefit from K-9 intervention. These should include calls that a K-9 could or should have been used but was not otherwise available. Don't forget to include calls for service outside your primary jurisdiction if you have a K-9 Unit(s) that are used for mutual aid.

- Environmental Conditions: Consider daytime heat and other weather factors that affect K-9 performance. Consider the recovery time needed for the dog team to properly rest and prepare physically and mentally for the next shift.

- Operational Needs: Prioritize tasks such as fugitive warrant service, explosive detection, demos, VIP security visits, and public relations based on historical demand. Remember that the dog's primary mission is to use its superior trained sense of smell to locate people, contraband, explosives and so on. Next is likely to be its public relations benefit followed by protection needs such as VIP visits or handler protection.

2. Shift Structure:

- Hourly Considerations: Evaluate 8-hour, 10-hour, or 12-hour shifts based on collective bargaining agreements and operational efficiency.

- It's crucial to recognize the unique role of K-9 units within law enforcement agencies and avoid considering them as part of minimum staffing for shifts.

Here's why it's important to view K-9 units as additional support rather than integral to minimum staffing:

a. **Specialized Role**: K-9 units are trained for specific tasks such as detection, tracking, and protection. Their skills and training are focused on handling specific situations that require their specialized abilities.
b. **Task Focus, Safety and Effectiveness**: When a K-9 team is deployed, their primary focus should be on the task at hand, whether it's searching for narcotics, tracking a suspect, or performing a search and rescue operation. Ensuring that K-9 teams are not overburdened with routine calls or pressured to rush their specialized tasks because of 'stacked' calls, contributes to their safety and effectiveness in fulfilling their mission.
c. **Resource Allocation**: Agencies should ensure that deploying a K-9 unit doesn't strain overall patrol resources or lead to gaps in general service provision. This means maintaining adequate staffing levels beyond the K-9 unit to handle routine calls and emergencies.
d. **Operational Efficiency**: By viewing K-9 units as additional support rather than integral to minimum staffing, agencies can enhance operational efficiency. This allows the K-9 teams to be utilized strategically based on their capabilities and availability, rather than being spread thin across routine duties.
e. **Professional Development**: Recognizing the specialized nature of K-9 units encourages ongoing professional development and training tailored to their unique roles, ensuring they remain effective and efficient in their operations.

- Supervisor Contact: Determine peak times for the K-9 Unit to have K-9 supervisor contact, not only during nights but also during high-activity daytime periods.

- Unit Size: Adjust deployment strategies based on the size of the K-9 unit and its capabilities.

    - Overlapping Shifts suggestions for small or one unit K-9: Implement overlapping shifts (e.g., 2 PM to 10 PM and 8 PM to 4 AM) to ensure continuous coverage during critical hours.
    - Overlapping Shift suggestions for larger K-9 Units: Consider including cross-training to vary deployment hours (e.g., 10 AM to 6 PM and 4 PM

to 12 AM) and for optimal coverage based on specific operational needs.

3. Flexibility and Training:

- Inter-team Training: Incorporate training with other K-9 teams during shifts to maintain readiness and coordination. Perhaps a shift that includes and allows the K-9 Unit to attend K-9 in-service training or train with other K-9 Units while on shift.

4. Geographic and Resource Considerations:

- Community Coverage: Incorporate crime data from multiple communities if applicable, to enhance predictive policing models. Remember all those other calls you respond to outside your primary jurisdiction.

- Shared Resources or Force Multiplier: Coordinate with other agencies to maximize resource utilization and operational efficiency. Perhaps working shifts that are opposite to neighboring or State jurisdiction police to provide better on-duty coverage of a K-9 Unit. Coordinate shifts with other nearby K-9 Units to provide for better on-duty coverage potential.

5. Adaptability and Evaluation:

- Periodic Adjustments: Allow flexibility in deployment schedules to adapt to changing crime patterns and operational requirements. Collective Bargaining Agreements might need to be revisited to allow for some flexibility. Do not overuse this flexibility and otherwise physical and mentally exhaust the K-9 Team.

- Performance Evaluation: Use data-driven results to continuously refine deployment strategies and justify any renegotiation of collective bargaining agreements.

Conclusion:

This framework outlines ***one structured approach*** to designing K-9 deployment strategies that are not only effective but also adaptable to evolving challenges and operational contexts. Implementing a ***data-driven approach*** to K-9 deployment enhances operational effectiveness, ensures strategic coverage during

critical hours, and optimizes resource allocation. By considering crime patterns, environmental factors, collective bargaining agreements, and operational needs, agencies can ***maximize the impact of K-9 units*** in law enforcement and better serve their community.

-*United States Police Canine Association (USPCA) Best Practices Group 2024*