SPSS®

Atlanta Police Department

Law enforcement team uses PASW® Statistics* to fight crime

Situation

Project Safe Neighborhoods, a federal initiative led by the United States Attorney General, works to create safer neighborhoods in America by coordinating with existing local programs that target gun-related crime. In Atlanta, Project Safe Neighborhoods concentrates on the Atlanta Police Department's (APD) firearm-related crime hot spots.

Challenge

The Atlanta Police Department realized that its criminal history records were not being fully utilized, and that officers would be better equipped to deal with violent and repeat offenders if they had more complete information. One of the major roadblocks to making this happen was the sheer amount of information in the Georgia State Criminal History Records Repository, which contained data on all individuals who had been arrested in Georgia during the past decade.

Solution

The APD turned to Applied Research Services, a public policy research firm, to organize Atlanta's criminal history records. Using PASW Statistics, Applied Research Services sorted and ranked all files in the repository based on the number and seriousness of violent offenses, identifying the most violent and high-risk offenders operating in Atlanta.

Results

- Developed a "hot list" of the 500 most dangerous criminals in Atlanta
- Deterred individuals on probation and on parole from committing additional crimes
- Deployed officers to areas frequented by violent and dangerous criminals
- Increased police officer safety by informing patrol officers of criminals located within their beat

At a glance

Country: United States

Industry: Law enforcement

City founded: 1837

Company type: Public

Employees: 1,732 sworn officers

Application

Crime prevention

Solutions used

PASW Statistics

* PASW Statistics, formerly called SPSS Statistics, is part of SPSS Inc.'s Predictive Analytics Software portfolio.

One of the keys to reducing violent crime lies in the collaboration and sharing of information within law enforcement agencies. Every day, federal law enforcement agents, prison guards, local police, and probation officers come across the same offenders, yet they each have incomplete information. Historically, different law enforcement agencies have not had the resources or commitment to share criminal knowledge with one another. But things are changing in Atlanta.

Under Project Safe Neighborhoods, a federal initiative designed to create safer neighborhoods in America by coordinating existing local programs targeting gun-related crime, the APD works with public policy research firm Applied Research Services to facilitate cooperation among law enforcement agencies. Atlanta's Project Safe Neighborhoods operates with prosecutors from the Atlanta City Solicitor's office, the Fulton County District Attorney's office, and the U.S. Attorney's office.

Atlanta's Project Safe Neighborhoods Task Force supplies data collection and analysis services to the Atlanta Police Department, allowing the APD to design strategies that more effectively reduce firearm-related crime. With SPSS for Windows, a statistical and data management package for analysts and researchers, Applied Research Services sorts and ranks files in the Georgia State Criminal History Records Repository to identify the most violent and high-risk offenders operating in Atlanta.

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– John Speir
  Co-owner
  Applied Research Services

Every time someone is arrested or convicted of a crime, they are entered into the Criminal History Records Repository. This "rap sheet" contains all the necessary information, including identification data (date of birth, Social Security Number, aliases, etc.), charges, and the court dispositions associated with every charge.

Applied Research Services is the first research firm in the nation to be given access to this data. The major reason is that the amount of information is so massive that most organizations don't know what to do with it. There are 2.1 million individuals included in the repository associated with information on nine million criminal charges and eight million arrest episodes.

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Developed a "hot list" of the 500 most dangerous criminals in Atlanta

After applying a series of criminal criteria to the repository files, Applied Research Services created a "hot list" of the 500 most violent and dangerous offenders in Georgia. Using PASW Statistics, every individual arrested during the past year was flagged, narrowing the list from more than two million to 12,000 individuals. Each person's complete criminal history was then examined, and offenders with three or more prior arrests for violent offenses—two of which had to occur within the past five years—and at least one conviction, were added to the "hot list." A typical person on this list is a severely chronic, violent offender who has been arrested 14 separate times for such crimes as homicide, rape, murder, or fighting with police officers.

The list, housed in PASW Statistics, was then distributed to the APD, the Atlanta Parole Board, the Georgia Department of Corrections, and the U.S. Attorney's office, allowing these authorities to coordinate and focus their efforts to make the streets of Atlanta safer.

"We're hoping to spread awareness that operational databases don't have to just sit in the office. There is huge potential for this information to help decision makers when it is analyzed and used correctly," said Applied Research Services co-owner Tammy Meredith. "In Atlanta, there are already a number of early indicators that crime is on the decline."

In 2003, Atlanta's Project Safe Neighborhoods reported that there was a 40 percent reduction in firearm-related homicides and a 23 percent reduction in fatal homicides when compared to 2002. There was also a 39 percent decrease in the number of firearm-related 911 calls.

Deterred individuals on probation and on parole from committing additional crimes

An important component of the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative involves delivering a deterrence message to active criminal offenders. Parole officers are working with county prosecutors to set up meetings with individuals who are on parole and have been identified as high-risk offenders. The "hot list" has allowed parole officers and county prosecutors to focus on the same individuals at the same time, making it easier to coordinate their efforts.

During each meeting, the Fulton County District Attorney tells individuals on the "hot list" what the consequences will be if they are caught using a firearm or are arrested again. In addition, the District Attorney informs the criminals they are being monitored closely by police in an attempt to deter them from participating in future criminal activity.

Deployed officers to areas frequented by violent and dangerous criminals

The "hot list" has also helped the police strategically plan routes for patrol officers. A handful of offenders account for a large portion of crime in every city. Keeping these violent offenders off the street will help cities significantly reduce crime.

Police officers in Atlanta are monitoring these chronic criminals by using the SPSS Inc. program to organize the "hot list" according to location. Police and patrol officers in the field are strategically assigned to areas frequented by Atlanta's most dangerous offenders. This deployment has allowed the APD to maximize its patrolling capabilities and increase efficiency during a time when it does not have the budget to hire additional officers.

"By focusing our efforts on those individuals who are the most criminally active and have a violent history, the Atlanta Police Department will have a longer-lasting impact on reducing crime in the city," said Major Jim Sellers of the APD.

Increased police officer safety by informing patrol officers of criminals located within their beat

The data provided by Applied Research Services has also improved the safety of patrol officers. By using map information in conjunction with PASW Statistics, officers are notified where high-risk offenders living on their beat are located. This information has allowed officers to better prepare themselves for criminal encounters and has decreased the element of surprise within their daily routine.

With PASW Statistics, Applied Research Services is working to create instant summaries of every criminal history record. The goal of the program is to create a one-page document highlighting the number of arrests, charges, and other pertinent information regarding every individual with a criminal history.

"This instant summary of information will be the most powerful thing that comes out of this project," said Meredith. "With PASW Statistics, we're putting all of the important information at the top of the list, so an officer can immediately determine how to handle individuals based on their past behavior."

The instant summaries will be made available on a secure Web site that all officers will eventually be able to access. The site will contain features that allow officers to call up

summary scores that rank criminals according to their level of risk. In the future, the data, which can be linked to a biometric fingerprint, will give officers the ability to finger-print criminals in their cars so that they can access this information immediately.

"We are hoping to spur some excitement about the possibilities of using this data in real time so we can develop those types of systems," Speir said. "The state has given us this data because of a shared vision. At first glance, people would rather have more police feet on the street than research or technology. But we're working hard to show everyone that research can help officers to do their jobs better and more efficiently."

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