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I would recommend the report for further consideration but encourage the author to address the concerns noted above prior to publication. In some instances the issues noted above will not be available in the present data. Nonetheless, the author could identify such issues thereby noting their significance for future research.

I have already noted above some discrepancies in tables or interpretation of tables which I feel should be addressed prior to publication. Some of my suggestions are straight forward such as the omissions and errors in Table 1 and Appendix A. Other suggestions, such as presenting raw numbers as well as percentages in all tables may reflect my personal bias in favor of allowing readers to make informed decision concerning the importance of the findings. Similarly, my preference for disclosing the underlying processes in determining valid and invalid or missing responses may only reflect a personal bias in presenting results. Other concerns may or may not be available in the present data, a decision which Professor Weiss will be in a better position to evaluate after further consideration of these data.

In general, I believe that the report is a valuable contribution and should be published and disseminated among policing agencies and academic scholars. My concerns, raised in the comments above, can be addressed by the author relatively quickly and a final document can be prepared for publication. I believe a carefully constructed critique of the limits of this initial study would prove beneficial to others attempting to further clarify the form and context in which informational dissemination takes place. For example, how might the initial questionnaire have been prepared to better identify dissemination centers or answer questions brought to light during the analysis phase of the project? Similarly supposition, however well conceived, should be clearly separated from the results provided in the analysis of these data.

## *Enhancing the Dissemination of Innovation in Community Policing: The Role of Information Sharing*

This is a study that offers a number of promises and potentials to provide police administrators with some important clues about how and where to access information, as well as a sense of community in the belief that seeking out information from other agencies is a common practice. The implications of a study such as this are clear, and could have lasting implications for both those who commonly seek information from others, and those who are commonly sought out.

However, in its present form and presentation, there are some fairly large gaps in the information and some conclusions that appear unsupported with the research as it is presented. In this respect, there appears to be the possibility of misinterpretations and misleading conclusions that a reader could draw from this document. For instance, the title of the manuscript suggests that the focus will be about the dissemination of information about "community policing." However, this is not the focus.

### **I. SUBSTANTIVE QUALITY**

#### **A. *What are the significant findings of the research?***

The basic findings reported here are that police agencies (especially planning units) do communicate with other agencies and do seek out information from other agencies, especially those who are perceived as good sources" of information. The reader learns that there are departments that are perceived by sizable minorities of other departments as the "best" sources of information, both in general and on specific topics. Some departments devote fairly sizable sets of resources to sharing information with others, and these tend to be among the largest departments.

#### **B. *Are the findings supported by the research?***

In some respects the findings are clearly supported by the research; in other areas, the conclusions seem to be derived from very sketchy pieces of data. For instance, on page 8: "Some agencies, for example, reported that they routinely contact a group of agencies, line an 'index' group..." Perhaps this is true, but there is no data shown to suggest that this is the case; in fact, some of the data reported would seem to contradict this, as several of the agencies listed here are not listed elsewhere as major sources of information. In this regard, then, how are these "index" agencies? No data or explanation is provided for this claim.

Similarly, it is disappointing to see little done with the data from state-level agencies. All that is really reported is that the Michigan State Police is the agency mentioned as an informational source most often, and therefore they are the most prestigious. This really is not at all informative (although MSP will like being called so).

Additional places where the conclusions/findings do not seem to coincide with the reported data include page 12: "Importantly, some factors like the personal relationship between the planners....seem less important." However, Table 4 suggests to us that almost

2/3 of planners say that this is a significant factor for them. Yes, this factor is slightly lower than several other factors, but not by much.

Page 13: "That is, when many organizations establish relationships to share information they tend to participate equally." So, if we are to conclude that those agencies that give information also seek it out at "equal" rates, what is this telling us? If, in fact, there are agencies that spend time answering questions, yet are also spending significant time seeking information what does this say about their "expertise" and/or the culture of the agency (is it a more communicative agency?). And, perhaps most importantly, there is no data to support this claim; we see nothing about the rates at which the most sought out agencies seek out information from others. The idea that they "participate equally" is not supported.

Page 15: It is unclear how they came to the conclusion that "the mean percentage of time consumed by these requests was over thirteen percent." The information in Table 7 tells us that 85.3% of the agencies report less than 10% of their time so devoted.

I have to seriously question the identification of some agencies (page 17) as supposedly most prominent and by implication "most informative" on topics. Identifying CHP, NJSP, and Dallas, San Jose, and Metro-Dade as the major sources of information on traffic services could easily be interpreted as a function of the fact that these are large and highly visible departments in the four states that have contributed the most respondents in the survey. This very fact is later (page 21) acknowledged as a possible confounding element regarding data interpretations; after all, a local department in California might contact CHP simply because they are the California Highway Patrol, not because they are necessarily the "best" in this issue. In short, the conclusions here seem to go beyond what the data call for.

Page 17: "The most striking results were found in our inquiry about community and problem-oriented policing." (This is also presented in the Executive Summary.) The reader is provided no clue as to what is so striking about these departments being listed. Is this to suggest that it's surprising that these departments are contact points? What is the "striking" aspect here?

Page 26 "Policy Implications" #6: "Many received over 90 such requests." This is another example of over-blowing the data; in fact, only 3.7% of departments received this number of requests, this is far from "many;" more accurately, "very few departments received more than 90 requests."

Page 28 "Recommendations" #5: the suggestion that "smaller agencies" could particularly benefit from electronic media is completely without support. What does "smaller" mean in this context? Where do we see anything in the data that suggests this is the case?

**C. Was the methodology appropriate and sound? If not, what improvements might be made?**

The survey approach is appropriate. A response rate of 71% is certainly acceptable. The one drawback here is that the reporting of which agencies participated is very confusing. The lists of agencies by state (Table 1 and Appendix A) do not match up; different numbers are reported in the two listings; why is this? Also, the Appendix listing does not appear to have any ordering to it; would it not make more sense to do an alphabetical listing of states, and then of departments under each state heading?

Also, the reporting of respondents' educational levels is unclear. To say that 36% hold a four year degree, 33% a masters and 17% a doctorate is vague; does this mean 36% have only a 4 year degree and an additional 33% have a masters, or do only 36% of the entire sample hold a 4 year degree?

**D. Is the report well written in terms of style, organization, and format?**

Generally the report is fairly well written. There are a number of places where there are words missing from sentences, and verb-noun agreement problems. However, these are not major, and a careful copy-editing could easily take care of this.

**E. Does the summary adequately describe the full report?**

Yes, the summary provides a concise version of the entire report. It would be nice, however, if the summary were not simply a pieced together version of the exact wordings in the full text. After reading the summary and the full text of the report, it is clear that the summary was a cut and paste job, not a restatement of the report in different, even simpler terminology.

## **II. IMPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH**

**A. Do the findings make a significant contribution to existing knowledge in the area?**

The findings certainly could make a significant contribution. However, with the present over-generalizations and numerous vague and unexplained statements, this is not the case. To be able to truly identify which departments are perceived by my colleagues as "best" to contact for specific issues would be very useful. For those of us in departments where we are besieged by requests for information, to be able to demonstrate that we are being consulted much more frequently than other similar sized departments would be great for political/funding arguments. However, to simply know that departments call each other for information, and some departments get this more than others, is not anything more than

supporting our common sense interpretations of reality as we know it. To be truly significant, there needs to be more specificity and more elaboration of what is actually going on, and how the processes of seeking/providing information are done.

***B. What are the implications, if any, for further research, program development, and evaluation efforts?***

These implications are very clear. First, there is clearly a need to go beyond this effort in research, to more clearly specify how these information seeking processes operate, and to determine how decisions about where to go for the information are made.

Program development issues could easily follow on some of the recommendations offered herein; the development of some form of formal network of agencies that are actively involved would be very helpful to those who are sought out frequently. The development of a tool/resource to disseminate to all agencies that identifies "good" sources of information on specific topics, and contact points at those agencies would be welcomed by most, if not all, agencies, regardless of size.

Evaluation of such a tool/resource would obviously be suggested if this were pursued. It might also be wise to assess the perceived quality of assistance/information provided by these "key" or "index" agencies. Not only knowing where agencies seek information, but the follow-up on how useful/helpful such information is perceived as being would be most useful. Whereas this report suggests that "prestige" is important in being identified as a good source to go to, operationalizing this measure would seem to be important as well. The current operationalization of "prestige" as an agency that is called on for information seems somewhat weak as a measure.

### **III. UTILIZATION**

***A. To whom would this report be of greatest interest?***

This report (in revised, expanded form) would be of great interest to the very people who provided the data for it, as well as all chiefs and those with research/planning responsibilities in agencies of all sizes. Similarly, all police training academies/institutions would undoubtedly find this very informative and helpful.

***B. Would you recommend this information for publication?***

Based on the issues identified and discussed above, I cannot recommend this to be published in its current form. However, with expansion, elaboration and clarifications (as noted) I would strongly recommend it to be published and widely disseminated.

***C. Describe fully any revisions or changes that should be made to improve the quality of the report or increase its usefulness.***

See suggestions noted above.

***D. Do specific dissemination vehicles exist that would be particularly appropriate for publicizing the research?***

Several important opportunities for dissemination of this information exist. Presentation and distribution of a revised report at conferences such as IACP would be very logical. Mailings to all law enforcement training academies and all state/regional level chiefs' organizations would be beneficial. Also, of course, standard NIJ announcements of availability would be beneficial as well.

***E. Summarize your overall rating of the report.***

Overall, I believe this is a report that holds great potential and promise to be a heavily used, relied upon resource that administrators and planners/researchers alike will keep at their fingertips on their desks. The ability to quickly and easily figure out where and how to seek information on particular topics is something we all would love to be able to do effectively and efficiently. However, the current form of the report does not provide such opportunities.

Review  
Alexander Weiss  
"Enhancing the Dissemination of Innovation in Community Policing:  
The Role of Information Sharing"

**Significant Findings:**

Alexander Weiss, in "*Enhancing the Dissemination of Innovation in Community Policing: The Role of Information Sharing*," addresses an important and neglected area of dissemination of information among police agencies. Professor Weiss's major conclusion is that there is an **informal** but **systematic** communication network between policing agencies which provides a basis for the exchange of information for planning and research purposes.

Based on a sample of American police organizations, the author identifies informational networks between agencies facing similar issues and problems. Contacts requesting information between agencies occur frequently and are based on the reputations of the agencies involved. The process of information gathering revolves around "**key organizations**" which act as centers of dissemination based on their standing and reputation in the police community.

According to the author, relationships between agencies are institutionalized and stable and generally are not tied to specific individuals. Agencies responding to the survey report an average of 22 contacts for information per year with demands on some agencies exceeding 90 requests per year. Given this volume, such requests place significant demands on the planning unit resources of some agencies.

When information on specific topics is requested, agencies with expertise and/or prior demonstration projects are identified and contacted for planning and research purposes. These "key organizations" come to be recognized as informational repositories and act as "centers



for dissemination for planning and research purposes. The author notes that while little effort is expended beyond telephonic technology, future demands may place greater emphasis on newer technological methods.

### **Methodology**

The author gathered information from a sample of American police organizations. Although the sampling plan is inadequately described, it appears that all full service police agencies with one hundred or more sworn officers were selected from a population of all police agencies. Additionally, a sample of 49 state police and highway patrol agencies were included in the sample. Thus, surveys were mailed to 517 local departments and all state organizations.<sup>1</sup> How the sample represents other police agencies from the population is not explained by the author. In fact, the external validity of findings would be limited to the agencies with characteristics included in the sample. Although thirty percent of the local police agencies and twelve percent of the state agencies did not respond, no effort is made to explain the sampling loss or examine characteristics of non responding agencies. Thus, the reader is not able to ascertain whether these non responding agencies have characteristics which would further limit the generalizability of results. Nonetheless, response rates were relatively high for survey research purposes and we appear to have a representative sample of agencies meeting the criteria specified by the author. Nonetheless, Professor Weiss should

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<sup>1</sup>Efforts to document that these agencies comprise the universe of full service agencies meeting the 100 sworn officer criteria are not documented. The author also makes no effort to demonstrate that the sample is representative of agencies not meeting the above criteria. The true sample, therefore is not from the population of American police agencies but from a sub population of full service agencies with 100 or more sworn officers. That the 517 sampled agencies are exhaustive of these criteria should be documented.

make the population and sample explicit since there is no reason to assume that these agencies are representative of smaller agencies.

## Findings

The presentation of the tables and information afforded is somewhat confusing and at times appears inconsistent.<sup>2</sup> Table 1 provides little useful information since there is no discussion of non-respondents. It could easily be moved to Appendix A without detracting from the presentation of results. Subsequent tables provide frequencies and percentages limited to valid responses rather than the entire sample. Information provided in Table 2, for example, includes 381 respondents or 73 percent of the original sample and 95 percent of the responding sample. No effort is made to explain what constitutes a valid response despite fluctuation between Tables 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 on the number of valid respondents. This is further exacerbated by the technique utilized in the presentation of data in Tables 4, 9 and 10 where the number of respondents, valid or otherwise, is not provided.

While it is clear that the telephone is the primary source of contact as noted in table 3, it is less clear that "emerging technologies appear to be playing a bigger part in the communication process." Bigger than what? The author does not provide baseline data and fails to solicit information on the respondent's perceptions of increases in new technologies. The tabular data indicates a much wider use of fax, personal visits and ordinary mail than new or emerging technologies such as bulletin boards or e-mail. While there is little reason to quibble with the conclusion that new technologies will be afforded greater use in the

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<sup>2</sup>For example, Arizona is included in Appendix A as a participating agency but is not included in table 1. Similarly, Salt Lake City, Idaho in Appendix A should be Salt Lake City, Utah. Utah which is included in table 1 is not in Appendix A. Careful consideration should be afforded these discrepancies prior to publication.

future, this conclusion is not supported by the data presented.<sup>3</sup>

The author concludes that the rationale for choosing a particular agency is unambiguous. Agencies with similar problems, good reputations and in the immediate vicinity were far more likely to be contacted. Although we are not provided with information on how such determinations are made, the author notes that hierarchically the most important factors are agencies facing similar problems, with good reputations and within the state or region.

The author seems to go beyond the data with respect to the relative stability of the communication process. The question of stability is not asked in the survey. While the hypothesis that a lower emphasis on personal contact (63%) than similar problems (93%) and reputation (91%) may imply stability over time, these data do not confirm this conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

The author appears to concentrate on the time involved in preparing responses to requests for information without a corresponding interest in time saved by responses to requests for information. In short, we are not provided a balance sheet of time expended and saved in the transfer of information. This omission makes it impossible to examine the process as mutually beneficial exchanges of information, especially among dyads and triads that constitute a significant proportion of all requests. Such an analysis may reflect a quid-pro-quo of informational exchange, offsetting the time expended in processing requests for information.

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<sup>3</sup>For example, if we had 8 e-mail responses in the year prior to the sampling year, we would conclude that emerging technologies were declining rather than increasing.

<sup>4</sup>In fact, the requests for information from the Oklahoma City Police Department may argue in favor of episodic events rather than stability over time.

That some departments may respond to far more requests may also reflect their size and geographic location vis-a-vis requesting agencies. The author maintains that agencies serving as **informational hubs** should receive support for this activity. Given the state and regional prominence of the agencies identified in Table 11, it is likely that agencies serving in this capacity already have larger budgets and arrays of expertise stemming from a broader tax base.<sup>5</sup> It appears that the author has the data necessary to determine the size and geographic location of these **centers of dissemination**. Such an analysis may demonstrate that agencies serving this function represent large urban areas which have garnered more information relative to the smaller requesting agencies surrounding them. This point is not meant to detract from the suggestion that available resources should be afforded these centers, but rather to put their role in the communication process in context.<sup>6</sup>

The identification of pivotal agencies may also be overstated given the supporting statistical information. For example, both the California Highway Patrol and the New Jersey State Police are identified as significant contributors to the informational exchange in traffic services requests. The data provided, however, indicates that they receive traffic services

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<sup>5</sup>Table 11 appears to bear out a regional distribution based on size. It is interesting that the Northwestern United States is not represented in this distribution network. The reader is left to wonder whether this is the result of a relatively few contacts noted by the author on page 21 or whether the Northwest is more likely to request than provide information to other agencies.

<sup>6</sup>It would also be interesting to see such a regional or state interpretation expanded. For example, the author notes that in identifying dissemination centers a few cases may alter the designation. At the same time there appear to be no dissemination centers in the northwestern United States. If a regional or state context is added would these areas have their own centers of dissemination? This appears likely given the significance afforded selection of agencies facing similar problems.

requests from only twenty-one and seven agencies, respectively. Such requests would constitute only 4.5 percent of respondents for the California Highway Patrol and 1.5 percent for New Jersey State Police.

Given these relatively low numbers for traffic services requests, it is difficult to evaluate requests for other specific domains such as domestic violence, gang activity, problem oriented policing and the like.<sup>7</sup> It does appear that serving as a site for a demonstration project enhances the number of requests for information but without information concerning the raw numbers of such requests, it is difficult to ascertain the numerical importance of these findings.

The author also provides information on the training and research capabilities of responding agencies. Commanders of planning and research units report that less than half of these units have adequate training. Thus, it is not surprising that information is disseminated and shared among agencies. However, there is no corresponding data presented about the informational expertise and amounts of training provided to agencies which respond to these requests. If the data are available to provide insight into the training and development of those requesting and providing information, it would enhance the overall report. The presumption is that the providers have more information and/or better training than those making requests. If this premise is empirically demonstrable in these data, it should be provided.

Despite these limitations to the description of these findings, many of the issues noted above may be available in the raw data. I would encourage the author to provide more

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<sup>7</sup>If these centers of dissemination also process less than 5 percent of all requests for information on these specific areas, this should be clearly stated. In fact, the actual response rates should always be included.

information from the data supporting and documenting suppositions provided from these data. For example, lacking fundamental training in research methodology, it is not surprising that agencies seek information elsewhere. However, it would be somewhat surprising to find that they seek such information from agencies equally ill prepared by training to provide useful information. It could be, for example, that agencies with "about the right" amount of training are seeking information from those with none or those needing more. If such a finding is available in these data it could alter the future directional flow of such information.

Even with these limitations in mind, I believe that the report provides many useful insights and will encourage examination of the informal flow of information between agencies. This knowledge is important to an evaluation of these informational exchanges and warrants publication of these results. Greater understanding of the existing process will assist agencies in developing more coordinated efforts to disseminate this information and may provide cost benefits to the agencies involved.

### **Executive Summary**

The executive summary is well written and identifies critical issues involved in the flow of information between policing agencies. It clearly identifies important findings and identifies important implications for the dissemination of information more generally. As noted above, some of the suppositions and conclusions appear to go beyond the data reported. Where possible, the data supporting these should be provided in the body of the text. Where supposition must proceed data, such distinctions should be made outright and addressed in future research. Issues such as the stability of relationships over time, the larger or increasing use of new technology and the direction of the flow of information from those with sufficient and limited training need to be identified and addressed.

## **Implications**

The author identifies a critical shortcoming in our knowledge of the dissemination of information for research and planning. As he notes, there are limitations in the present research in the ability to identify the centers of dissemination. Publication of these findings will no doubt encourage both Professor Weiss and others to further pursue these issues. Obviously, this previously unidentified area of dissemination provides an opportunity to enhance the information available to law enforcement agencies. It is likely that similar mechanisms exist for sharing information between agencies not included in the sample. The extent of contact between such agencies should be further explored since smaller agencies may be more reliant on inter-agency informational exchange than those represented in the current sample.

## **Utilization**

This report would be particularly useful to agencies lacking departmental research capabilities who have not entered informational networks. It might also serve to strengthen existing networks by providing greater insight into how they function. The dissemination of what works is particularly critical during periods of police innovation. As interest in community and problem oriented policing expand, such information becomes vital to organizations in earlier planning stages. Knowledge of the activities of other agencies, especially agencies which have implemented such strategies, provides information critical to the evaluation of the process of implementation and impact assessment of such strategies. To the extent that the author is correct regarding increasing uses of more sophisticated technologies, efforts could be expended by regional dissemination centers to make such information available on home pages, bulletin boards and through electronic mail.

- New York City Police Department
- Phoenix Police Department
- San Jose Police Department
- San Diego Police Department
- St. Petersburg Police Department.

Communication between state police and highway patrol organizations is well developed and relatively sophisticated. Many state-level respondents told us that they routinely contact many other organizations on a wide range of issues. This is consistent, of course with our findings that agencies tend to contact others that face similar issues. The state and provincial division of IACP has done a great deal to facilitate this communication by gathering information about the practices of all the organizations, and then disseminating it. With respect to our measures of prestige, the Michigan State Police is the state agency mentioned most frequently as a source of information.

In Table 11 we describe some attributes of the departments identified as centers of dissemination.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Data for this table is derived from Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics, 1993. Bureau of Justice Statistics.



Agency	# Sworn	Four year degree req.	Police Expense Per resident	Computer in Research	Hrs. Training Required	% Non sworn
Baltimore Cnty.	1380	N	\$133	Y	1080	13
Boston	1952	N	260	Y	1040	25
Charlotte	897	N	NA	Y	640	19
Chicago	12,368	N	247	Y	1100	21
Cincinnati	944	N	144	Y	1280	19
Dallas	2810	N	146	Y	1804	20
KCMO	1171	N	198	Y	1290	34
Los Angeles	7662	N	158	Y	1011	24
Metro-Dade	1448	N	128	Y	1336	29
NYPD	28,079	N	248	Y	915	21
Phoenix	1983	N	160	Y	920	24
San Jose	1219	N	160	Y	1400	26
San Diego	1847	N	147	Y	1736	28
St. Petersburg	515	N	178	Y	1280	28
LEMAS Sample		1%	134	60%	Mdn. 1120	22

Table 11. Summary Data for Select Cities

Our group of cities shares some characteristics. First, these departments are relatively large. Second, they do not require a four-year degree for recruits. Third, They tend to have higher per capita expenses for police services. Fourth, the organizations tend to have a greater proportion of non-sworn employees. This may contribute to their more successful planning operations. Finally, the organizations are spread throughout the country.

### **Policy Implications**

This study has examined patterns of communication between police planners. We sought to learn more about how and why they communicate with each other, and how that communication influences the police research process. The major findings of this research include the following:

- Police planners often contact other police organizations to obtain information to use in the planning and research process.
- These requests are systematic. Most organizations can identify another organization that is a good source of information.
- When choosing another organization to contact, planners are influenced most by whether or not the other agency faces the same problems and issues as they do, and whether the other organization has a good reputation.
- These communication relationships are not normally tied to individuals. Rather, they are more institutionalized, and stable.

- Most communication by police planners is by telephone, though emerging technologies like e-mail and the Internet offer significant promise in this area.
- The agencies in our study receive, on average, 22 requests for information per year. Many received over 90 such requests.
- Responding to such requests poses a significant demand on planning unit resources.
- When seeking information on specific topics police planners tend to be very selective in their choice of whom to contact. For example, the San Diego Police Department was viewed as the best source of information about community and problem-oriented policing.
- Most police planning unit commanders and their staff lack the kind of training which would enable them to conduct research internally.

Based on our findings we can make several recommendations:

- *The police community should acknowledge and encourage the network of communication between police organizations.* Our study has demonstrated the presence of an informal, yet relatively sophisticated system for the efficient and effective sharing of information between departments. While this network can not probably replace more formal channels of communication, it is nonetheless, a key component of the dissemination process.
- *The key organizations in this network should receive resources to support their dissemination activities.* The police planning community has created a system for the dissemination of research. Supporting this network could

prove most beneficial to the agency and to groups like NIJ. It might be quite effective, for example, if NIJ would routinely distribute numerous copies of relevant publications to a group of police organizations. This would permit the organizations to distribute the information, thus increasing exposure and reducing the agency costs.

- *NIJ should continue its efforts to enhance the research capacity of police organizations.* In the recent past NIJ has instituted a number of programs designed to increase the internal research capacity of police organizations. Programs like the Locally Initiated Research Collaboration Project that teams researchers with police practitioners is a very positive step, one that is consistent with the findings of this study. Additional efforts might include providing training in research methodology for police planners, or support for groups like the International Association of Law Enforcement Planners, the principal professional association for police planning and research officers.

hmm?  
Is the research component why some agencies are considered prestigious?

- *The choice of site for research and demonstration projects should be based, in part, on an agency's prominence in the communication network.* Many police planners equate agency expertise with research experience. That is, police planners are inclined to believe that the sites of large research or demonstrations project are the best place to look for information on that subject. For example, the Milwaukee Police Department, site of one of the Spouse Assault Replication Projects, was cited as an organization to contact for information on domestic violence. This suggests that an agency is likely to serve a dissemination role after the project's completion. It would seem that

Why? Would this site grow the growth of other agencies?