



Case Study

Centralizing Baltimore's Crime Camera Program to improve effectiveness and cost efficiency



Baltimore's CitiWatch crime camera program was launched in 2004. By the end of 2007, when Sheryl took over management of the program, there were just under 500 cameras. This crime deterrent program was groundbreaking, and Baltimore was one of the first cities in America to implement such a system. But decentralized, it had a range of inefficiencies, including:

- three types of cameras using a variety of software programs;
- three vendors;
- three agencies managing the cameras; and
- varying degrees of quality between cameras.

Process & Outcome

To better understand program operations, Sheryl met with each agency lead, collecting information through standard questioning, meetings with IT and a hands-on review of the cameras. She learned, among other issues, that the camera vendor with the poorest performance and camera quality was also the most expensive.

She also discovered that all agencies involved—Baltimore City Police Department (BPD), Housing, IT, City Purchasing and others—were interested in collaborating on a more effective, centralized system. Sheryl brought the agency leads together, overseeing and managing the development of a focused, multiple-step, multi-year plan for centralizing and improving crime camera operations.

Over the next four years, Sheryl kept the program moving forward and on track. Her role was broad and included oversight, project management and day-to-day administration for:

- sourcing the right vendor,
- ensuring problem resolution,
- maintaining and monitoring the cameras and
- expanding the network.



The first step was an RFP for a single vendor to upgrade the existing cameras, put them on the same software platform and allow the agencies to access all camera feeds from any location. Sheryl worked with agency representatives and Baltimore City Purchasing, drafting, editing and scoring the RFP, and selecting the new vendor, which included creating the review framework and insisting on a multi-agency committee to review proposals and agree on the outcome. The decision was to utilize an existing vendor to run the program; moving to this single vendor and integrating disparate systems saved Baltimore City \$1 million annually and dramatically improved camera quality.

With the vendor in place, Sheryl's role shifted to ensuring integration milestones were met and problems were resolved, such as facilitating a solution for camera vandalism. She held weekly progress meetings with key partners—including Housing, BPD, IT and the new vendor—and worked with BPD to design and implement an improved camera monitoring plan based on crime statistics.

Working with the key partners, she hired a crime analyst to explore crime trends in all camera areas and generate a daily monitoring plan, managing this project and consulting with the police lieutenant in charge. A group of specially trained monitors and analysts—including retired and light-duty police officers—began reviewing camera feeds 24 hours a day from a centralized location. Today, staff still actively monitor and use camera outputs to alert police to incidents before and as they occur.

Sheryl's role included leading and managing interagency collaboration, which involved looking for ways to strengthen and grow the network. Using crime data and community requests, they added more than 100 crime cameras to the network during her tenure, installing new camera grids in neighborhoods needing extra visibility.

These new cameras were paid for with grant money she secured. She applied for and received federal Homeland Security and Department of Justice grants to pay for the installation of new cameras and worked with City Housing to apply for HUD funds to support the new cameras in public housing developments.

In addition to cost savings and operational efficiencies, this consolidation continues to reduce crime in Baltimore City. In 2010, the program led to investigations and more than 125 arrests for violent crimes, and the cameras were involved in approximately 1,280 arrests during that year. The CitiWatch Crime



Camera Program was formally evaluated by the Urban Institute, a nonprofit research group that investigates US social and economic issues. This study, published in September 2011, found that the cameras had reduced crime by up to 25 percent in coverage areas.