

# Ventura County Sheriff's Office

## TACTICAL NEGOTIATIONS UNIT



## Operational Guidelines

Updated December 2019

**Ventura County Sheriff's Office  
Tactical Negotiations Unit  
Operations Guidelines**

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## **MISSION**

To defuse critical incidents involving persons who are in crisis, suicidal, barricaded, or are engaged in hostage taking or terrorism activities through specially trained and equipped negotiators. This is accomplished through persuasion and problem solving; while continually providing gathered intelligence should a tactical solution become necessary.

## **BACKGROUND**

The use of negotiations in law enforcement is recognized as a successful method of resolving an incident peacefully. In most events, the longer a subject refrains from injuring or killing persons, the greater chance for a peaceful resolution. It is recognized some circumstances are non-negotiable and may warrant a tactical resolution.

Nothing in this manual shall preclude the use of necessary force by members of the Sheriff's Office when acting in their official capacity in protecting the lives and/or safety of citizens and/or Sheriff's personnel.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Although this manual was developed to provide guidelines for tactical negotiators, every situation is unique and no plan can be universally applied. It is possible those persons actually involved in negotiations could depart from any of the material contained herein, and would do so correctly, provided the decision was based upon sound reason and good judgement.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The Tactical Negotiations Unit (TNU) is a resource for the Incident Commander and offers trained negotiators in situation where dialogue may avert a violent confrontation and result in a peaceful, controlled surrender. TNU works in cooperation with all tactical and support units. In all response situations, the person designated as the TNU Team Leader will report to the TNU Captain, who will in turn report to the Incident Commander (IC).

The four priorities of the TNU are:

1. Save Lives
2. Initiate Communications
3. Buy Time
4. Gain Intelligence

The objectives of the TNU may include the following:

1. Establish rapport with and gain the confidence of the subject
2. Persuade the subject to surrender
3. Persuade the subject to release hostages and relinquish weapons
4. Formulate problem solving strategies that may resolve the situation
5. Provide intelligence updates to the IC
6. Manipulate the subject's movements so as to offer the safest possible conditions for a tactical solution

## **GENERAL OPERATING PROCEDURES**

### **Call Outs, Response and Arrival**

1. Upon arrival, negotiators shall prepare their individual equipment and assemble together at a location near the Incident Command Post. As soon as three negotiators are present, the Team Leader or most senior team member may contact the IC and provide the ready-status of the TNU.
2. If possible, communicating with the subject should be delayed until at least three negotiators have arrived. However, there may be times when it is strategically advantageous to quickly engage the subject in conversation to achieve verbal containment and request surrender. Each negotiator is authorized to begin negotiations prior to the arrival of the entire team, at the direction of the IC.

### Negotiation Operations Center (NOC)

The TNU Captain and designated team leader will determine the location of the NOC. The NOC should be placed in the same general area as the tactical operating center, but not co-located with the Incident Command Post. The NOC must provide a safe environment out of the line of fire and afford the greatest amount of privacy and isolation. Access to the NOC should be limited to essential personnel only and controlled whenever possible.

### Contact and Communications

Arriving negotiators may find a first responder, dispatcher, or third party intermediary already engaged in conversation with the subject. When strategically appropriate, the negotiator should relieve the first responder. Another negotiator shall fully debrief the first responder for information about the subject, his/her motivation, demands, threats, weapons, deadlines, hostages, injuries, promises made, lies told, or items given to him. **ANY** use of force against the subject by law enforcement should also be disclosed.

Generally the subject should be contained before structured negotiations begin. However with modern technology this may not be possible. Some negotiations may occur while the subject is on foot or driving. The decision to begin negotiations rests with the Incident Commander based on input from the TNU and SWAT Captains (except when relieving a first responder, as outlined above).

Available methods of communication may include landline telephone, cell phone, bullhorn, PA system, throw phone, text messaging, video chat, social media, etc. Face-to-face negotiations are highly discouraged, due to the extreme unpredictability and inherent danger. The decision to use face-to-face negotiation rests with the IC based upon a recommendation of the TNU Captain. Whenever possible, only sworn law enforcement officers, trained as negotiators, will be utilized for face-to-face.

The subject should be isolated from outside influences and his communications abilities should be controlled as quickly as possible. This may include diverting or eliminating a hard line, cell phone or internet access. This can be accomplished by contacting cell and hardline phone providers directly. Consider the subject may have more than one cell phone, tablet, computer, or internet provider available to him.

Disconnecting power and services to the subject's location may help manage or manipulate the subject's environment to our advantage. Approval to interrupt services must be obtained by the IC, based on a recommendation from the TNU and SWAT Captains, prior to taking action.

Whenever possible, only trained police negotiators will communicate directly with the subject. Using Third Party Intermediaries (TPI's) such as family members, employers, business associates, love interests, clergy advisors, media representatives, etc., to speak directly with the subject can be unpredictable and is generally discouraged. TPI's may prove useful in creating a recorded statement or appeal to the subject, which then may be played for him at a strategic time. Use of a TPI requires the approval of the IC, with the recommendation of the TNU Captain.

## TEAM CAPTAIN: DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The TNU Captain has overall responsibility for the unit.

### At Incidents:

- A. Initiates the call-out notification
- B. Responds to the scene, contacts the IC and obtains event objectives
- C. Briefs the team on incident specifics and objectives
- D. Makes team assignments in conjunction with the Team Leader
- E. Manages the TNU component of the incident
- F. Provides briefings and updates to the IC
- G. Ensures team members attend the on-scene debriefing, as well as coordinating any follow up debriefs if the event was particularly difficult, emotionally draining, or involved loss of life.
- H. Delegates a team member to write an event summary

### General:

- A. Periodically reviews unit policy and procedures
- B. Ensures the unit is appropriately staffed and functioning with trained personnel and equipment
- C. Ensures the equipment is routinely tested and repaired/replaced as needed
- D. Completes budget and purchase requests properly
- E. Manages overtime
- F. Maintains relevant files and records
- G. Maintains/creates partnerships with other law enforcement agencies
- H. Coordinates training requests
- I. Responds to media inquiries or makes referrals to the Sheriff's Public Information Officer
- J. Organizes the selection process for prospective TNU members

### **TEAM LEADER: DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The TNU Team Leader directly oversees event negotiations and manages the team in the absence of the Captain

#### **At Incidents:**

- A. Responds to call-outs, gathers other team members, reports to IC in absence of the Captain
- B. Works with the Captain to identify team roles and NOC location
- C. Briefs the team on incident specifics and objectives
- D. Manages the TNU component of the incident
  - a. Monitors and guides negotiations
  - b. Coordinates gathering of intelligence
  - c. Regularly debriefs the negotiators and reviews tactics
  - d. Reviews the ongoing effectiveness of team members in their assigned roles and reassigns as needed
- E. Provides briefings and updates to the Captain
- F. Coordinates subject's demands/request with the Captain
- G. Ensures team members attend the on-scene debriefing, as well as coordinating any follow up debriefs if the event was particularly difficult, emotionally draining, or involved loss of life.

### **TEAM MEMBERS: DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **General:**

- A. Responds to call-outs when notified
- B. Advises the TNU Captain if involved in any situation or condition that may affect his/her ability to function as a team member
- C. Update the TNU Captain with changes in address, phone number, and work assignment
- D. Whenever possible, attend meetings, quarterly and annual conferences and scheduled training and notify the Captain of any scheduling conflicts that would prevent such attendance

## TEAM ASSIGNMENTS

At an incident, negotiators may be assigned to perform any of the following functions. Team members should be familiar with all of the following positions.

**Primary Negotiator** - Speaks directly to the subject. May receive guidance and support from the Coach

**Coach** — Listens to the communications between the primary negotiator and the subject. Ensures the primary negotiator focuses on *listening* to the subject and utilizes the FBI *Behavioral Change Staircase* to gain influence. The Coach is the direct contact to the primary negotiator.

**Intelligence & Information** — Two team members should be assigned if possible. Gathers intel/info from all available sources including victims, witnesses, family members, friends, department resources (ARTIC, Crime Analysis, Classification, Records), escaped/released hostages, etc. The interview of accomplices is the primary responsibility of Major Crimes. However, TNU and SWAT personnel should be allowed access to the interview and have an opportunity to inquire of the accomplice in order to obtain information that might further a successful resolution to the event.

**Scribe** -- Keeps NOC boards updated with information. Specific notations should be made for *hooks, triggers, demands, threats, deadlines, motivations, things worked on, suspect info, hostage info, injuries, and medical needs*

**Logistics** -- Maintains the check-in/check-out log and assignments, handles requests for termination of services, obtains copies of reports and records if possible, and manages ancillary needs for the team (food, rest facilities, supplies). An equipment technician may fill this position.

**Equipment and NOC Ops** -- Maintains the TNU response vehicle and all equipment in good working order. Conducts one, four-hour training day per month, devoted to testing and inspecting the equipment. Arranges for equipment repair through the Captain or the Team Sergeants. On call-outs responds with the NOC and sets up all equipment. Ensures equipment operates properly for the duration of the event.

**Psychologist** -- The team psychologist should be used strictly as a consultant / advisor and not as a negotiator. The psychologist will be stationed in the NOC with the ability to monitor the subject's conversation in order to provide insight to the subject's mental health state and potential useful communication styles. The psychologist may also be utilized to contact health organizations (hospitals, counseling centers, etc.) in an effort to gain useful information about the subject that might further a successful resolution to the event.

**TRAINING, SELECTION, RETENTION****Training**

All team members are required to attend the 40-hour Crisis Negotiations Course certified by the FBI or POST.

The TNU will conduct relevant training consisting of scenario-based team trainings, and joint SWAT/TNU training events that include simulated negotiations. Team training is a minimum of two hours. Other law enforcement agencies may participate in TNU training events when authorized by the TNU Captain and Commander.

Additional training opportunities include California Association of Hostage Negotiators regional quarterly training days (8 hours) and annual training conference (32 hours). Any training opportunity that furthers the skills and abilities of a negotiator may be considered.

**Selection Standards**

When TNU vacancies exist, a collateral vacancy announcement may be generated by the Captain and distributed by Human Resources. Minimum qualifications for Negotiator may include:

- A. Deputy, Senior Deputy, or Sergeant
- B. A minimum of two years law enforcement experience at time of application
- C. Demonstrated above average verbal skills
- D. Has the ability to be persuasive and use logic to convince others
- E. Above average problem solving skills
- F. Flexible and able to react quickly and effectively in rapidly changing circumstances
- G. Able to work well with others in a confined, intense group environment for extended periods of time, under pressure.

Minimum qualifications for Equipment Technician may include:

- A. Non-probationary Sheriff's employee
- B. Two years law enforcement experience at time of application
- C. Knowledge and experience with technology including computers, cell phones, wiring, audio/video, mechanical, internet and social medias.

After complying with the application requirements outlined in the vacancy announcement, application may be invited to an interview panel and scenario-based exercise comprised of TNU members, chaired by the Captain.

### **Retention**

Participation with the TNU is at will. Team members must display an involved and dedicated outlook towards the team and its mission. Cooperation and mutual support of other team members is paramount. All team members must comply with all Sheriff's Policies, procedures, and TNU guidelines. Team members who receive repetitive below standards ratings on their annual performance appraisal may be removed or suspended from the team.

### **Activation**

The guidelines and procedures for activating the TNU are found in Sheriff's Policy 409, *Tactical Negotiations Unit Activation*.

### **Equipment**

The Equipment Technicians are responsible for the readiness of the TNU equipment. The equipment is stored in the response vehicle (NOC). The team member(s) assigned the NOC is responsible for the security of the equipment while under his/her control and for ensuring all supplies used during an incident are restocked.

TNU equipment is not to be loaned to other Sheriff's units or outside agencies without the approval of the TNU Captain (or Sergeant). Generally, a member of VSO TNU will accompany any short-term loan equipment.

Generally, requests for additional or new equipment or technology should be submitted to the TNU Captain for review before purchase. Equipment issued to individual TNU members must be maintained in accordance with Sheriff's Office policy.

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