

# Innovation the key to inspiration

The AFP's Innovation Centre is another great idea for technology advantage in Australian law enforcement.

Constables Serena Wong, left, and Luke Smorhun test drive the Innovation Centre's in-car tablet

While most of us are head down and busy with the moment, AFP Chief Information Officer (CIO) Rudi Lammers is thinking about the future through the AFP Innovation Centre. As Assistant Commissioner Lammers says “if it wasn’t for people like Steve Jobs where would we all be today?”

“His innovation brought about massive change for the everyday person in the street, and that is what we hope to do for police in the Innovation Centre here,” Assistant Commissioner Lammers says.

The centre was opened at AFP Headquarters in Canberra in March 2012, with an aim of fostering cooperation between the AFP and industry to provide technology that assists in preventing and detecting crime. But behind that stated aim is a lot more. The AFP Innovation Centre is about ideas – very good ideas.

AFP Coordinator Technology Innovation Frank Schiliro says the Innovation Centre provides a practical environment to develop and test information communications technology (ICT) before its deployment into service.

“The Innovation Centre was created in response to the AFP’s business requirement to reduce the cost of resources and operational processes,” Federal Agent Schiliro says. “We are trying to achieve a competitive advantage by using a try-before-you-buy approach to access new technologies.”

## A different concept

The Innovation Centre’s model of technology projects differs significantly from others. Federal Agent Schiliro says old methods of project managing technology procurement are problematic.

“The way it’s been done in the past in a lot of places is that people come up with a need and they want technology to fill that gap. There is nothing that they can tangibly feel or see or hold. So they have to engage with consultants, bring in the development team and build something.”

According to Federal Agent Schiliro, that’s a very long cycle and it takes a long time to get what they want.

“Then at the end of the project they come out with something that is not always exactly what they wanted.”

The Innovation Centre’s model essentially turns this process around. It doesn’t have a procurement function. It’s about the ideas.

In working with ICT producers and vendors on a continual basis, the AFP and industry are building relationships. The Innovation model looks at what already exists with industry and industry gets a more realistic understanding of what the AFP needs, how the AFP works and how it goes about its business.

“Even though a lot of industry and vendors think they have a good idea of what police do, when you sit down and talk to them their whole concept is really based on what they see on television,” Federal Agent Schiliro says.

The Innovation Centre in Canberra is connected and equipped with standalone technology to access the internet. So vendors can safely connect to their own networks and demonstrate pilot projects to the AFP. Deep in the heart of the AFP’s home, industry can get an in-depth understanding of what the AFP is about. “Armed with that knowledge, industry can then better customise and configure their products in line with what we need,” Federal Agent Schiliro says.

## Modern tools for modern times

Another critical evolution in the innovation model is to go beyond technology procurement to find out why the technology is necessary in the first place. To demonstrate this, the Innovation Centre proactively generated an initiative to produce a paper on the needs of operational police and how those needs have changed with time. A key component of keeping police ahead of modern crime trends was mobility. In essence, keeping police in the field and reducing the need to return to the office was a key finding.

Computer tablet technology in the post-smartphone world is a perfect example. Looking toward the next generation of in-car computing, tablet technology may provide huge gains in terms of keeping operational police in the field. Federal Agent Schiliro says the Innovation Centre is currently working on the user interface of the tablet to see how it could work.

“We have been keeping in mind the need to keep police mobile and not confined to a desk-top or a car. We are working on a platform where police can carry tablets





Constable Serena Wong demonstrates the mobility of having tablet technology.



An intuitive interface makes using tablet technology simple.

with them outside of the vehicle and do all those in-car functions from the tablet.

“It will have a ‘smart investigators tool kit’ there. So if police need to obtain a statement they can actually do it from the tablet, and get the person to sign it and deliver the statement electronically to the AFP’s central operational system.”

## Recognition

Operational police at Canberra’s city police station instantly recognised the potential of the tablet. Constables Luke Smorhun and Serena Wong from ACT Policing had an opportunity to view the tablet and were given a demonstration on how it would work. The response from them, and other police at the station, was remarkable in itself.

“It’s more advanced than the system we’ve got installed,” Constable Smorhun says. “It would definitely be a step ahead.”

Constable Wong says there are definitely things that draw police back to the office, so using tablet technology to do vehicle and person checks at the scene would make things more efficient.

“It’s just the little things; the short cuts that would enable us to not keep people waiting on the side of the road while we were doing the searches.”

The Innovation Centre is also attracting interest in other jurisdictions in Australia and overseas. Federal Agent Schiliro says an initial aim is to engage state and territory jurisdictions. As part of this effort, Assistant Commissioner Lammers is proposing to table an agenda item at the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency CIO Forum to seek support from other law enforcement agencies to get on board the innovation approach.

Federal Agent Schiliro’s ultimate aim is to establish a collaborative working group that could develop good ideas into great prototypes and, where possible, fund products together that could potentially benefit all jurisdictions.

There has also been interest from law enforcement agencies such as the Metropolitan Police in the United Kingdom.

“The Metropolitan Police read about us and contacted me about our model,” he says. “They are very interested because they would like to explore that avenue as well.”

It seems you just can’t keep a good idea down.

“Active policing is increasingly becoming international,” he says. “Crime doesn’t have state or international borders. There are many best practices that we can learn and share from each other.”