



Successful Practices & Strategies

Vol. 5 | No. 7

Vallejo Police Department

Vallejo, California

www.vallejopd.com

Community policing element

Community partnerships and organizational transformation

Problem/issue

High crime complicated by adversarial relationship with the community we serve

Problem description

As Vallejo was the first city in California to file bankruptcy in 2008, the Vallejo Police Department (VPD) lacked resources and staffing to respond to, let alone prevent, crime. We had an adversarial relationship with residents; trust was lacking, residents didn't feel safe, and we didn't seek public input on how we enforced laws and promoted safety.

Community policing strategies implemented

Given low funding and staffing, we realized that our agency needed the community's help to combat crime and changed how we treated both residents *and* officers. The VPD engaged residents, participated in almost 1,200 community events in three years, and increased transparency. We answered calls for engagement and social justice for youth. Our officers and residents engage in nonenforcement activities, working together to address crime, agreeing on a process and establishing priorities for each neighborhood. Activities have included the following:

- Night Walks with clergy
- Launched a summer late night youth basketball league
- Monthly youth activities
- Annual Dinner with the Chief
- Monthly Coffee with the Cops
- Operate a Citizen's Police Academy
- Created a Chiefs Advisory Board
- Formalized partnerships with community groups
- Voluntarily participate in Police Data Initiative (PDI)
- Increased use of social media
- Launched a phone app
- Hosts "Know Your Rights" events
- Created a "Business Watch" program
- Created a Community Engagement Officer position
- Increased officer training
- Opened an off-duty sleeping room to reduce officer fatigue
- Integrate officer fitness into culture



Change and/or impact as a result of these community policing efforts

The VPD was informed in late March 2017 that our agency won the prestigious James Q. Wilson Award for Excellence In Community Policing by the Regional Community Policing Institute through the California Chiefs of Police Association. Recognized for transforming our department through community policing, the VPD followed the recommendations of the Task Force on 21st Century Policing established by President Obama in 2014. Now, “what do residents want?” and “how do we ensure we are transparent and accountable?” are considered when making policy and strategy decisions.

Partnerships have blossomed, especially those supporting youth, as requested by the community. A late night summer basketball program targeting at-risk youths gives youth a chance to interact with police on an informal level, building confidence in and learning from officers about issues like conflict resolution and sexual health. Juvenile arrests decreased, and 66% of iBall participants report having a good conversation with police.

School resource officers have returned to schools where they were previously unwelcome. Body-worn cameras are worn and data are voluntarily published online. According to residents, there is a palpable feeling of positive change on the street. Vallejo went four months without a homicide, the longest duration since 2010. Part I (i.e., violent) crimes dropped from 6,815 in 2013 to 5,953 in 2016. Citizen tips are used and have steadily increased since early 2015. In addition, the VPD is seeing an increase in invitations from community groups to attend events.

Lessons learned through program implementation

The VPD has learned many lessons operating with critically low staffing, especially the impact that community policing could have on our city. Both police and the community undoubtedly benefit from transparency and engagement. “The interaction between the department and citizens doesn’t just boost people’s positive feelings about police officers,” Chief Andrew Bidou wrote in a column on the Police Foundation website. “It boosted police officers’ feelings about the people. It reminds them that they are in fact just regular folks, with feelings and struggles in life that we all endure.” As the VPD became more responsive to community needs, residents and stakeholders responded with support, trust, and respect. Police learned that citizen engagement has taken longer than expected and wasn’t automatic. Once eroded, trust takes time to rebuild. We now understand that police need to be flexible, communicate, and listen to residents. VPD engagement with stakeholders is daily thorough in-person meetings, social media, and official press updates, and our officers are deeply committed to making a difference in the community they serve.

The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

The Internet references cited in this document were valid as of the date of publication. Given that URLs and websites are in constant flux, neither the author(s) nor the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services can vouch for their current validity.