

# COMMUNITY POLICING

A Patrol  
Officer's  
Perspective

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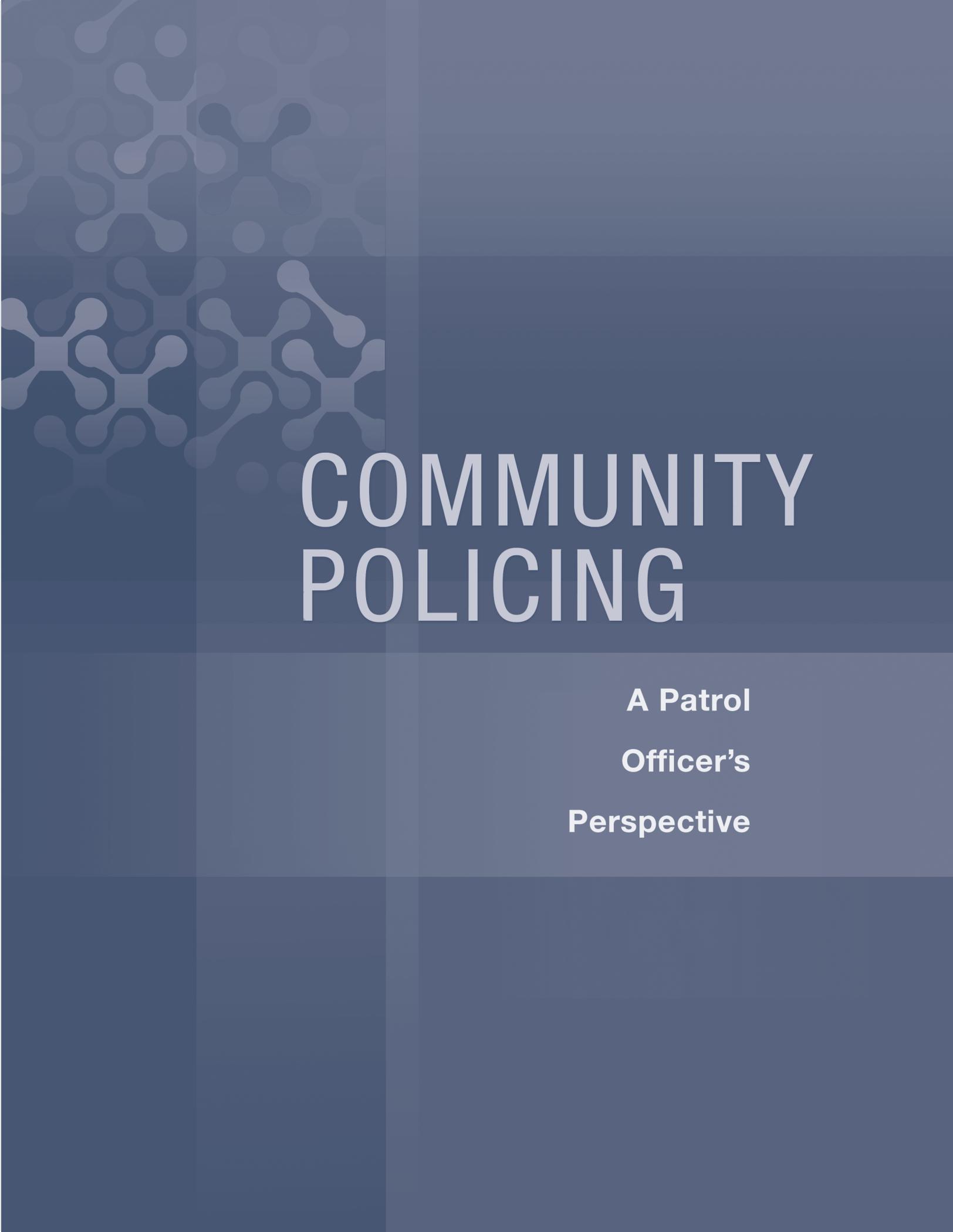
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# Letter from the Director

Colleagues:

Patrol officers are the vanguard in any new policing initiative—whatever the directives of leadership, it is patrol officers who ultimately implement those directives on the ground. Their relationships with community members are the backbone of law enforcement’s partnership with the community. No community policing effort to support public safety can succeed without the understanding and support of the rank and file.

This publication, *Community Policing: A Patrol Officer’s Perspective*, and its companion volume, *A First-Line Supervisor’s Perspective*, seek to illustrate what community policing looks like on the ground and to recommend steps individual officers and supervisors can take to implement community policing practices in their agencies. It contains many examples from the front line of officer-led problem solving and policy.

The ideas and guidelines in this publications are meant to support patrol officers as they implement new ideas and directives in their agencies. On behalf of the COPS Office, I would like to thank the author for drawing on his own experiences in the field to create an actionable set of recommendations—and, as always, to thank our nation’s patrol officers and deputies for their service in keeping our communities safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Keith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Phil Keith, Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services



# Introduction

## What is community policing?

Community policing is a movement to make law enforcement accountable, connected, and useful to the communities it serves. At the organizational level, it promotes “strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.”<sup>1</sup> Community policing rests on three foundational principles:

- **Community Partnerships.** Collaborative partnerships between the law enforcement agency and the individuals and organizations they serve to develop solutions to problems and increase trust in police.
- **Organizational Transformation.** The alignment of organizational management, structure, personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem solving.
- **Problem Solving.** The process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate effective responses.

Implementing these principles usually begins with law enforcement leadership, but the ultimate responsibility—and an organization’s success—rests with the patrol officers and first-line supervisors who must translate principles into practice.

## The role of patrol officers in community policing

For decades, the nature of community policing has evolved and adapted to suit the communities where it has been adopted. However, its goal has been consistent: to enable police officers to be more proactive and community members to be more involved, in order to create safer, more secure, and less fearful communities. Successful community policing requires, first, collaborative community partnerships between local police and other local government agencies, nonprofits, community groups, businesses, and the media; second, a shift from hierarchical decision-making to allowing and training patrol officers to engage directly in creative problem solving with residents; and third, changes in the organization and structure of the police department to support the goals of community policing.<sup>2</sup> It is important, however, also to recognize practical limitations. While law enforcement officers can identify problems and can often provide leadership in organizing solutions, they do not, nor would we expect them to, have all the resources and skills necessary to eliminate root causes of crime.<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Community Policing Defined* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p157-pub.pdf>.

2. *Community Policing Defined* (see note 1).

3. *Community Policing Defined*, 10–11 (see note 1).

Local law enforcement agencies across the United States have implemented elements of community policing. Agencies' mission statements routinely incorporate the importance of working in partnership with the communities they serve. Such statements explain the need for a problem-solving relationship between community members and the police to identify and address the conditions giving rise to crime.<sup>4</sup>

But how do we, as patrol officers, evaluate whether or not our agency is truly providing community policing? And once we have made this evaluation, how do we then maximize our efforts at the patrol officer level to ensure that we continue to provide community policing and to improve it both conceptually and practically? In short, how do we assess and promote the best that community policing can offer?

Frontline officers are first responders who by necessity become the vanguard in new and shifting policing efforts. Many ideas have been developed and adapted over the years—intelligence-led policing, direct patrol, proactive policing, hot-spot policing—but community policing has remained a consistent strategy. Policing is one of the main direct services a city, town, or state provides, and therefore often becomes the first line of contact between government and the community. Community policing leverages this contact, drawing on police and community resources to address the conditions that give rise to crime and disorder and solve complex, systemic problems.

The three primary components of community policing are police/citizen partnerships, effective problem solving, and organizational transformation. Each

component complements the other; used together, they provide the most effective approach for the patrol officer to implement community policing.

### **Focus of this guide**

This guide is intended to help frontline police officers—first responders—better understand how to provide leadership, engage in effective partnerships, and solve problems in the communities we serve. The guide includes information regarding what factors can be, to some degree, controlled and what strategies can be implemented in a practical way to enhance community policing. Of course every agency has its own unique structure that may not permit comprehensive implementation of all the components of this manual, but this guide is intended as a living document that is flexible and can be built upon.

It is important to note that the overarching hallmarks of a successful community policing program are the willingness to experiment and the commitment to keep trying, notwithstanding some challenges. One example of such perseverance is the microgrant projects funded by the COPS Office—this initiative is designed to provide small-grant seed funding to enable law enforcement agencies to create, test, and implement innovative ideas in a real-world setting. Agencies have identified various successes and challenges during design and implementation, but some of the resulting projects have been adopted by other agencies with great success, such as the Coffee with a Cop program developed by the Hawthorne (California) Police Department and the Interdiction for Protection of Children training developed by the Texas Department of Public Safety.<sup>5</sup>

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4. A good example of such a statement is the Dover (New Jersey) Police Department's mission statement: "The mission of the Dover Police Department shall be to promote a partnership between the community, businesses, government, the media, and law enforcement designed to reduce crime and improve the overall quality of life, while encouraging the community to determine its own needs through the exchange of ideas and problem-solving techniques." ("Community Policing," accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.doverpolicenj.org/newpage3.htm>.)

5. Information about the program can be found at the Community Policing Development Grant program web page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/cpd>.

From a situational crime prevention perspective, crime requires three components: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and a lack of a guardian.<sup>6</sup> (See illustration in figure 1.)

Imagine the size of a police force that would be required to ensure a guardian everywhere and at all times so that crime would not occur. It is an impossible task. That is why community partnerships are essential to policing in order to maintain a sufficient level of crime control. Work by researchers such as Professor Danielle Raynald at Australia's Griffith University argues that in modern communities we need other capable guardians—informal guardians, our citizens—in order to adequately maintain public safety and security.<sup>7</sup>

To meet this need, we turn to community partnerships, the creation of which can be broken into three areas: engagement, relationships, and partnerships. In a time of crisis, it is much better to have already established engagement and relationships than try to develop partnerships from scratch.



**Figure 1.** Using the Crime Triangle to Focus on Immediate Conditions (Victim/Offender/Place)

To understand a problem, many problem solvers have found it useful to visualize links among the victim, offender, and place (the crime triangle) and those factors that could have an impact on them: for example, capable guardians for victims (e.g., security guards, teachers, and neighbors), handlers for offenders (e.g., parents, friends, and probation officers), and managers for locations (e.g., business merchants, park employees, and motel clerks). Rather than focusing primarily on addressing the root causes of a problem, the police focus on the factors that are within their reach, such as limiting criminal opportunities and access to victims, increasing guardianship, and associating risk with unwanted behavior.

6. "The Problem Analysis Triangle," Center for Problem Oriented Policing, accessed July 27, 2017, <http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=triangle>.

7. Danielle M. Raynald, Maud van Bavel, and Hank Elffers, "Experimental Research on the Relation between Formal and Informal Guardians at Place," panel presentation at the American Society of Criminology conference, November 16, 2011, Washington, DC.



# Community Partnerships

## Engagement

Many police agencies have built longstanding relationships through engagement with the community they serve. Other police agencies have experienced strained relationships with their communities. This is not just a city issue—it occurs in suburban and rural communities as well. The question is, what engagement can you, as a police officer, initiate to develop successful partnerships with everyone you serve? It is vitally important to take the first steps in the engagement process.

Initial engagement can start off with patrol officers attending community events and meetings. Officers have to be willing to reach out to community leaders and ask permission to participate. At these events, patrol officers will begin to learn more about the community and its concerns. Faith-based organizations and schools are also excellent locations for officers to connect with members of the community; these institutions generally have developed close relationships with members of the community and can open the door for officers to start a dialogue. Over time, this dialogue with the community can improve the relationship between the community and the police.

A dialogue is simply a conversation, but it can be the essential element for establishing legitimacy. Legitimacy is the ultimate goal that allows a police agency to function. Building Trust and Legitimacy is the first pillar identified by the Task Force on 21st Century Policing in its 2015 report.

### Innovations in Community Policing

The 2016 Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Services in Community Policing in the Innovations in Community Policing category was awarded to Community Liaison Officers Lawrence E. Geis and Scott B. Clinger of the Columbus (Ohio) Division of Police.

Community Liaison Officers Clinger and Geis have worked diligently to address residents' and business owners' concerns regarding a rash of criminal activity and their success has led to an examination of several problem hotels and businesses in Columbus. The officers were instrumental in the adoption of a new city ordinance establishing safety rules for hotels and motels. As a result, crime and calls for service at hotels and motels have decreased significantly.

Tom Tyler, a Professor of Psychology at New York University, is a leading procedural justice expert. He argues that the police need public support to be effective; that the public supports the police when they believe police authority is legitimate; and the public makes that judgment based on the way the police exercise authority.<sup>8</sup> In short, legitimacy is impacted by the perception of fairness and justice. This is the first of the four pillars of procedural justice: ‘fairness and consistency of rule application’ in both the processes and outcomes of engagement with law enforcement.<sup>9</sup>

### “Do Good, Be Good, Treat People Good.”

That’s the philosophy of Deputy Sheriff Elton Simmons of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. Simmons has issued more than 25,000 citations in his two decade career without receiving one complaint. Simmons has a friendly and fair approach to all drivers and he actively works to defuse unnecessary anxiety during the traffic stop.

Source: Laura Kunard and Charlene Moe, *Procedural Justice for Law Enforcement: An Overview* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015): 5.

How does an officer use dialogue to establish trust with community members? Patrol officers do it every day in our formal role of solving crime: we can build trust relationships even with suspects as we gather intelligence or information. But this principle applies not only to suspects and informants but to a patrol officer’s communication with the larger community as well, because the community itself may have the essential information necessary to address crimes or other policing issues.

Patrol officers can create formal opportunities to have dialogues: there have been numerous examples of programs to facilitate this, such as Coffee with a Cop,

Living Room Conversations, and Community Dialogues. But these events do not have to be formal. For example, several officers sitting down at a local fast food or coffee shop can create a welcome environment for the community to come over, stay for a bit, and ask questions.

Living Room Conversations occur when a community member agrees to let an officer come to their home and invites neighbors to join them. Living Room Conversations have been held successfully even in communities where many people don’t know their own neighbors. The conversation isn’t initially about crime in the neighborhood, but is an opportunity for community members to get to know their law enforcement officers in pleasant circumstances, before they have to call on them in a crisis. Participants in Living Room Conversations held as part of the Seattle Safe Communities project, for example, told the author that it was helpful to know the command staff, but overwhelmingly more important to know the beat officer that was going to respond to a call for a car theft, prowler, or burglary. Living Room Conversations can be enhanced by food—breaking bread with the community goes a long way to build trust—but food isn’t necessary if budgets are tight. It’s showing up that matters, and bringing people together face to face.

Programs like Coffee with a Cop or Living Room Conversations often miss an important population that can have an adversarial relationship with the police—youth. The Donut Dialogue program was created by the Seattle Police Department and homeless youth from Peace for the Street by Kids from the Streets (PSKS) as a means for youth and police to sit down together and have a healthy dialogue.<sup>10</sup> The name evolved after the groups first sat down together because of a simple, funny observation heard when listening to the homeless youths: police officers like

8. Tom Tyler, “Enhancing Police Legitimacy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 593, no. 1 (May 2004): 84–99.

9. Laura Kunard and Charlene Moe, *Procedural Justice for Law Enforcement: An Overview* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015): 5.

10. June 29, 2012 personal conversation with Det. Kim Bogucki of Seattle Police Department.

## Coffee with a Cop: Building Trust with the Community One Cup at a Time

In March 2011, the Hawthorne (California) Police Department Community Affairs Unit hosted its first Coffee with a Cop event. Police and community members came together in an informal, neutral space to discuss community issues, build relationships, and drink coffee. Since then, the Coffee with a Cop program has expanded to all fifty states and to cities on four continents; the concept has expanded to include Cookies with a Cop events for young people.

Coffee with a Cop removes physical barriers between officers and residents. Beyond that, it removes situational barriers—it takes place outside of the crisis situations that routinely define interactions between law enforcement officials and community members. Instead, it allows for relaxed, informal one-on-one interactions in a friendly atmosphere.

Through a strategic partnership between the Hawthorne Police Department (HPD) and the University of Illinois' Center for Public Safety and Justice, a national training program was established in 2013 with a series of regional workshops taught by veteran officers. HPD Captain Keith Kauffman, one of the workshop instructors, was struck by the program's effects: "In my short 20 years in law enforcement, I can honestly say that this class is one of the very few I have seen that is taking hold and making a real difference in policing."

donuts. Many other agencies have since replicated or created a similar program. As with Living Room Conversations, the patrol officer's priority in the initial conversation is getting to know the youth. After that, dialogue can focus on laws or on how the two groups can better communicate on the streets—these conversations are open and flexible. Conversations with youth can be raw, but the relationships they establish have helped solved numerous crimes.

Interestingly, the National Institute of Justice conducted an opinion survey of Los Angeles residents examining the types of contact with police officers

In addition to peer trainings, social media has also spurred the spread of the initiative, reaching new audiences across the nation at a level that in-person workshops cannot. The Coffee with a Cop Facebook page allows for interagency connection and sharing of information. The page includes notices of upcoming local events and photos and video from past events; it provides a venue for jurisdictions to showcase their local programs. Coffee with a Cop can also be followed on Twitter: @coffeewithacop.

Additionally, the [coffeewithacop.com](http://coffeewithacop.com) website provides downloadable resources for law enforcement agencies as they plan their local events. It allows agencies to register local events on an interactive map that community members can view, and allows community members to give anonymous feedback about their local Coffee with a Cop events. All community comments are forwarded to the local agency's contact person, if they have registered their event and provided an email address. These comments have been overwhelmingly insightful and positive.

Source: Adapted from "Coffee with a Cop: Building Trust with the Community One Cup at a Time," *Community Policing Dispatch* 6, no. 12, December 2013, [https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/12-2013/coffe\\_with\\_a\\_cop.asp](https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/12-2013/coffe_with_a_cop.asp).

that led to better attitudes.<sup>11</sup> An important finding of the survey was that residents who had only informal contacts with police (such as conversations with policing officers on patrol, at community meetings, and at police-sponsored youth activities and community safety fairs) held the highest opinions of police performance and officer demeanor. Those with only formal contacts (such as 911 calls, police questioning and interviewing, and arrests) held the least positive attitudes toward local police.<sup>12</sup>

11. Cheryl Maxon, Karen Hennigan, and David C. Sloane, *Factors That Influence Public Opinion of Police* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2003), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/197925.pdf>.

12. Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane, *Public Opinion of Police* (see note 12) 5–6 and Exhibit 2.

## Relationships

Relationships and trust go hand in hand. For relationships to flourish, they must be built over a period of time. Taking the time to build relationships may run contrary to a patrol officer's perceived need to quickly solve crime and meet a timeline of action, as well as the 'get in and get out' dictates of many field training officers (FTO) and agency call response standards.<sup>13</sup> Over the long term, however, building these relationships will help patrol officers understand the root causes of crime and reduce it in the neighborhoods they serve. The strategies for engagement described in the previous section are all good ways to start these relationships, but first responders can engage with community members even during regular calls for service.

Honesty is an important hallmark of good police work; patrol officers know firsthand that to build trust they must be both honest and open. But they may also feel a conflicting need to be guarded about information, because of the negative impact disclosure can have on a criminal investigation. Perhaps counterintuitively, honesty is just as important when there are constraints on the amount of information you are able to disclose. Be clear about what information you are able to provide. If you don't currently have enough information to answer a question, don't be afraid to admit it, and to tell people that you will seek out answers to their important questions.

Neighborhoods and community associations often use technology to communicate, through social media, listservs, group pages, neighborhood websites, and commercial platforms like Nextdoor.com. If patrol officers are invited to join these groups, they can use the site or service to let residents know of situations in their neighborhood, dispel rumors, or find out about problems.

All of these relationships, however they have been built and maintained, can be used in a time of crisis to effectively communicate with the community. In turn, patrol officers may learn from these relationships, gathering information they can use to help their departments become more effective.

## Partnerships

The root causes of crime are complex, and addressing them often requires specific services that a police agency is not able to provide—for example, mental health services, treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, or services for the homeless. One way to address problems beyond the scope of one police agency's mission or abilities is to partner with other organizations. As patrol officers, we can create formal or informal partnerships and collaborations with social services providers, neighborhood groups, other police agencies, city departments, and faith-based groups.

Effective partnerships include the following components:

- Stakeholders with a vested interest in the collaboration
- Trusting relationships among the partners
- A shared vision and common goals for the collaboration
- Expertise as a representative partner (background, experience, or knowledge)
- Engaging in teamwork strategies
- Open communication
- Motivated partners
- Means to implement and sustain the collaborative effort
- An action plan
- Follow up
- Assessment of the effectiveness of group efforts<sup>14</sup>

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13. James Copple and Nicola Erb, *Rank and File: Leaders in Building Trust and Community Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016), <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p351-pub.pdf>.

14. Tammy A. Rinehart, Anna T. Laszlo, and Gwen O. Briscoe, *Collaboration Toolkit: How to Build, Fix, and Sustain Productive Partnerships* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001), 6, <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-w0686-pub.pdf>.

Using all of these elements will allow for a successful partnership. Trying to balance call load and district integrity while also building longstanding partnerships can seem overwhelming—but remember, partnerships are about sharing the responsibility and the workload. Don't be afraid to do so.

While relationships may exist for their own sake, partnerships have goals. In developing a partnership, you first need to determine who should be at the table—who shares your goals or might have an interest in the project. Depending on the size of the problem to be addressed, you might have one partner or many. As a patrol officer it is important to ensure the project is not so large that it is beyond effective management by the group. The Problem Solving section on page 23 will discuss ways to triage your project to determine its manageability and optimal size.

#### **Community meetings: A guide for patrol officers**

If you are trying to form a partnership with an existing organization or coalition which already has a standing meeting, make contact with the chair or organizer and explain why you are seeking a partnership and what you hope to gain by being allotted a certain amount of time at the meeting to communicate your goals. Respect the time given to the existing meeting's topics and be available after the meeting to discuss the proposed partnership in more detail.

If you are still trying to determine what partners should be at the table, or to define your goals or the scope of the problem, you may need to initiate a meeting with potential partners yourself. Figuring out where to start can be overwhelming. Remember, the best problem solvers try to start without fearing failure! Come to the meeting with an agenda. This tells people you respect their time and that the meeting has a purpose and a goal. Contact the attendees in advance to find out their interests and concerns. It can be good to start with an introduction;

you can make this an opportunity for attendees to get to know each other. Don't spend too long on icebreakers—you want to respect each other's time—but giving people a chance to get acquainted helps develop the connections that can ultimately build a cohesive problem-solving team.

The host of the meeting has the sometimes-difficult task of staying on schedule and moving the meeting forward, while taking care not to be perceived as rude to any participant or group that tries to dominate the discussion with their particular concern. After all, you are trying to build relationships with all participants. Create a "parking lot" for topics that are not necessarily related to the issue at hand, but still may be important for the participants to discuss. Leave time in the agenda for these parking lot issues to be addressed.

Let people know you want to address their concerns. If you can't stay after the meeting, be sure to provide your contact information. Otherwise, people may drop out of involvement because they have not felt heard. Respect people's time, accomplish what needs to be done, and end the meeting. If the meeting ends early, that is fine; it is possible to undermine what has been accomplished by wasting time at the end of the meeting with a discussion about nothing.

#### **Define and keep focused on the mission**

A patrol officer's job is mission-driven, but a necessary component of that mission is leadership: when officers arrive on scene, the community looks to them to handle the situation. This is as true in a community policing project as on a call for service. The community will look to the officer to provide the mission, or vision, regarding both the nature of the problems in the community and the goals for solving them.

The mission will always relate to making the community safer. The different stakeholders who participate in the process may have different ideas for how to accomplish this, and there may be disagreements

along the way; however, you must keep the focus on the mission. A mission should be clear, concise, achievable, and descriptive. It will include what you want to accomplish and an overall way of getting there. This is why it is important to establish goals and objectives that are reasonable, and why every stakeholder should feel they had the opportunity to provide input.

Frequently, patrol officers involved in a community policing project talk about the positive synergy that develops with stakeholders. When a neighborhood begins to turn around because of community efforts, it brings pride to the neighborhood, and more and more people want to be a part of its success.

After your meetings with community members, follow up with other officers to disseminate information about contacts—other community members whose assistance may be important to the work. Maintain contact with the group of stakeholders.

Where possible, help groups to find assistance handling issues outside their scope. This may mean engaging other social services or community groups and acting as a liaison. In turn, these other agencies can provide support with issues encountered during calls for service and regular patrol.

# Organizational Transformation

Organization transformation is the last, but not the least, of the necessary elements for successful implementation of community policing practices. Well-designed organizational changes can establish the necessary foundation and structure for success.

Though the concepts and practices of community policing have been around for several decades, many police agencies still take a top-down approach to organizational transformation. As a patrol officer, you will need to keep asking and finding ways to answer a critical question: How can I participate in and effect change in a meaningful way?

There are four major domains of agency transformation: organizational structure, agency management, personnel, and information systems.

## Organizational structure

In the early 1990s, researchers began to look intently at how police agencies could provide a structure in which community policing could expand and thrive. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) began to focus on the patrol officer's role in changing the police agency:

As the emphasis and methods of policing change, the position of the police officer in the organization changes also. Instead of reacting to specified situations, limited by rigid guidelines and regulations, the officer becomes a thinking professional, utilizing imagination and creativity to identify and solve problems. Instead of being locked in an organizational straitjacket, the police officer is encouraged to develop cooperative relationships in the community, guided by values and purpose, rather than constrained by rules and excessive supervision. To make this possible, much thought must be given to designing the structure of police organizations and to recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting officers in the field. Changes must be made in all of these areas to create a new police professionalism.<sup>15</sup>

In short, patrol officers are the key to the success of a community policing program and, more broadly, to the overall success of police organizations in building safer neighborhoods and an improved quality of life.

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15. Edwin Meese III, "Community Policing and the Police Officer," *Perspectives on Policing* 15 (1993): 1–2, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/139164.pdf>.

Early community policing proposals focused, appropriately, on changes at the patrol officer level, such as professionalization of the occupation; recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices; the reduction of hierarchical organizational practices; and enrichment of officer skills—all changes intended to empower patrol officers.

More than twenty years later, despite some attempts at change, we still have far to go to optimize police agency structure, culture, and systems in ways that support effective community policing. However, we can identify some aspects shared by successful programs.

### Decentralization

*Organizations of professionals are distinguished by extensive and continuing professional training, by shared understanding of and commitment to the values of the profession, by extensive lateral communication, and—perhaps most important—by the absence of elaborate and complex hierarchies.*<sup>16</sup>

In many agencies, the patrol officer is not just part of such a hierarchy, but a low-level part: someone who “spends an 8- or 10-hour tour of duty sitting in a police car, responding to calls when directed by a dispatcher, and complying with the rigid structure of detailed rules and regulations that will keep the officer from being criticized or penalized by superiors.”<sup>17</sup> But as we look at what still needs to happen today for community policing to flourish, one finding from the earlier research remains paramount: “the need to decentralize authority to the lowest operational level—the officers in direct contact with citizens and the community.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, changes must be made to the attitudes of command staff, to supervision practices,

and to the all-too-common rigid hierarchal model of police agencies, in ways that support community policing efforts.

Men and women who enter the police department as professionals expect professionalism in their work. Officers facing complicated social and community issues need more discretion and authority to make good decisions on the street.<sup>19</sup> Shifting expectations towards autonomy and discretion respects officers’ professionalism and lets them do a better job keeping the community safe:

[By] making it legitimate for rank-and-file officers to think and be creative in their daily work . . . the potential benefits are of two kinds. The most important is the improvement that this could produce in the quality of the responses that the police make to oft-recurring community problems. In addition, such a change would be directly responsive to some critical needs in the police organization—the need to treat rank-and-file police officers as mature men and women; to demonstrate more trust and confidence in them; to give them more responsibility and a stake in the outcome of their efforts; and to give them a greater sense of fulfillment and job satisfaction.<sup>20</sup>

Anticipating problems in programs that attempt to transform a traditional organization such as a police department, the DOJ report notes that “organizational changes imposed by police executives often look good on paper, but the test must be whether they do in fact improve communication and expedite action.”<sup>21</sup> For this reason, it is important to seek feedback on

16. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 3 (see note 16).

17. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 4 (see note 16).

18. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 4 (see note 16).

19. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 2 (see note 16), noting also that “[i]n community policing, the de facto discretion that always existed (and that often was used well by police officers) is recognized and developed, rather than limited or discouraged.”

20. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 5 (see note 16), (citing Goldstein, H. “Problem-Oriented Policing” (1990), 2).

21. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 5 (see note 16).

proposed changes from line officers, and to collect such feedback at each stage of implementation, to determine whether the new structures, policies, and channels of communication are in fact working. Every new aspect of organizational change should be regarded as a work in progress until proven successful, to foster the flexibility to make further change as necessary. “Two-way communication and the opportunity for effective dialog is a vital part of a truly professional organization.”<sup>22</sup>

The DOJ report also contains specific suggestions from individual police agencies that have implemented different mechanisms for participatory management, such as meetings and committees designed to encourage agency creativity, and communication and participation in decision-making from all ranks in the agency.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, these efforts are often modeled on examples from local businesses and industry. Look out for and explore examples in your own community that seem to work well. Finding good examples can help communicate ideas.

More recent information is provided in the Task Force report and other publications on procedural justice. “Procedural justice refers to the idea of fairness in the processes that resolve disputes and allocate resources. It is a concept that, when embraced, promotes positive organizational change, bolsters good relations with the community, and enhances officer safety.” Its pillars are fairness, voice, transparency, and impartiality.<sup>24</sup>

### Embrace change

Organizational transformation is the foundation of community policing, but it can be the most difficult step, because change is hard. People resist change for a variety of reasons, such as fear of the unknown, fear

of failure, or satisfaction with the way things are. Moreover, people often resist changes they did not initiate themselves, especially if they lack respect for the leader promoting the change.<sup>25</sup>

For this reason, Bridges and Bridges (2009) recommend a three-step process for implementing change:<sup>26</sup>

1. Ending, Losing, and Letting Go
2. Neutral Zone
3. The New Beginning

Step one calls for a healing period when the old ways are gone; it is important to acknowledge the prior policies and procedures within the organization but clearly discuss that new standards will be implemented in the future. In step two, the “neutral zone,” the old ways have ended but the new process has not yet begun. This can be a difficult transition but also an opportunity for officers to discuss and provide feedback on the new system and policies that will be implemented. This period of time also allows officers to review new policies. In phase three, the new system, program, or project begins and officers can identify questions or concerns that leadership should address during implementation.

When implementing change in a police agency, each of these phases should make a place for significant patrol officer involvement. This allows for officer buy-in to the process, and lets officers more comfortable with change to help their peers better understand the process.

Policing agencies and the private sector have had success with using teams to gather feedback and develop strategies to work on a new policy or issue. Each team should comprise officers with different

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22. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 7 (see note 16).

23. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 7–8 (see note 16).

24. Kunard and Moe, *Procedural Justice for Law Enforcement* (see note 10).

25. John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 56–60.

26. W. Bridges and S. Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2009), 4–5.

areas of expertise, knowledge, and experiences—including personnel—to provide different insights. In order to be successful, such teams should

- understand the role of the team and individuals involved;
- define the decision-making process;
- develop a process for communication when disagreements or misunderstandings occur;
- develop a follow-up plan after an idea is implemented to continue communications and make adjustments along the way.

### Despecialization

Police agencies often create specialized units, intended for a temporary time, to address particular needs, such as a specific crime spike in a community. There can, however, be continuing difficulties or miscommunications in how these specialized units interact with community policing initiatives. As one example, patrol officers may assume a newly created unit will handle a particular problem, yet the specialized unit might believe patrol officers are handling it. Smaller problems are especially likely to slip through the cracks this way, as specialized units may perceive their focus to be only on a larger problem.

A police agency should ensure that all officers, wherever they are assigned, are trained in community policing practices. This fosters the development of generalists, with overall expertise in problem solving. This is not easily accomplished in times of budget cuts and staff reductions; however, great problem-solving skills are what ultimately permit police agencies to make the most of reduced resources, by addressing the causes of crime and reducing overall call load.

### Organization and assignment of officers

In recent years, there have been many experiments in new types of policing, from intelligence-led policing to hotspot policing. These efforts often focus on specific, small geographic areas, and these new policing models are often decided at command level without

consultation with patrol officers. Thus, when a new effort is launched, patrol officers may lack knowledge of the program. Sometimes, the lack of input from different levels leads to insufficient resource allocation across different shifts, watches, emphasis patrols, or specialized units.

Shifting assignments, even temporarily, across specialized units and different watches can help all officers understand and participate in change. It is also important to have a centralized place, such as a website, where all patrol officers and supervisors can readily access information about current policing initiatives. Patrol officers should be invited to review this information frequently, both to be aware of current projects and to consider how current policing models can be incorporated into their specific roles in the agency. Additionally, they should be encouraged to input information and observations from their own work that may be relevant to the project.

### Agency management

Agency management, as the name implies, speaks to the various ways a police organization operates and makes decisions; this may seem beyond the reach of patrol officer influence. However, even in the most traditional, top-down police agencies, there are ways to be influential and effective in refocusing the agency's mission towards community policing, even in a politicized environment. Following are some key components of effective agency management and ways that patrol officers can engage with each component.

#### Leadership

*"Leadership is influence."<sup>27</sup>*

Patrol officers provide leadership every day on the street when they handle calls for service or conduct case work. But police agencies are often structured as paramilitary organizations; accordingly, patrol officers are often reluctant to demand or expect leadership roles in organizational change. Leadership from the patrol level may feel unconventional, but it most definitely can, and should, happen.

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27. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 1 (see note 26).

Successful strategies for effective patrol officer engagement begin with the establishment of trust with front line supervisors. Perhaps surprisingly, this trust does not flow automatically from the close and intense working relationship. You must build trust and develop a place where your opinions, ideas, and suggestions are sought out and valued.

This relationship will begin with and depend upon good communication with your supervisor. This creates the circumstances for information to begin to flow down—and up—the chain of command.

Have patience. Even the best of ideas may take years to take root. As Harvard Business School professor Joseph Badaracco reminds us: “Quiet leadership is a long, hard, race run on obscure pathways, not a thrilling sprint before a cheering crowd.”<sup>28</sup>

Another important component of quiet, or unconventional, leadership is flexibility. Great ideas can come from the knowledge and experience gained at the patrol level. But even the best idea will still need to be vetted many different ways, at many different levels—and it will change through that process. Moreover, even the best ideas may never be fully realized. Please don’t be discouraged.

Simple ideas can have significant reach in the community. As a first step you may want to suggest and implement ideas with a proven track record in other jurisdictions, such as Coffee with a Cop or Living Room Conversations. If these innovations work to establish trust and credibility in the community, they are also likely to build trust and credibility for your ideas within the chain of command. Even if they don’t, good intentions, and finding positive lessons from ideas that don’t work, can also go a long way towards building the necessary relationships to expand community policing.

## Labor relations

Labor relations are how we describe the way that changes in the work environment are negotiated. There are ways that patrol officers can work alone, or through their unions and guilds, to influence areas of labor relations in ways that promote community policing. For example, patrol officers can advocate for input into the performance evaluation process, with the goal of creating a promotion process that considers candidates’ success with, and commitment to, community policing work. If your agency does not use evaluations for promotion, requesting them could be an effective place to begin advocating for change.

Consider also advocating for changes in titles and ranking systems to promote the view of police officers as professionals. It may also be useful to advocate for more promotional opportunities for nonsupervisory positions. As the DOJ report noted: “A system that provides sufficient incentives for the successful police officer throughout a career of basic police work properly recognizes the professional status of the person who is on the street and in the neighborhood, working directly with the public.”<sup>29</sup>

As a patrol officer, you should also have a say in how your union or guild supports the department and their efforts in working with the community. It is important for every officer to offer time, financial support, or other assistance in areas where the union can support the community policing initiative. Simple ideas for unions or guilds to move forward in this area include providing school supplies to local schools or helping out youth programs by volunteering time or money.

## Policies

Seeking out and incorporating patrol officers’ input into new policy is always valuable because they will be the ones carrying out most policies as first responders.

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28. Joseph Badaracco, *Leading Quietly: An Unorthodox Guide to Doing the Right Thing* (Watertown, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2001), 34.

29. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 4 (see note 16).

Encourage transparency and openness of process within agencies and offer comments and suggestions if requested during policy and procedure implementation.

Many policing agencies are experimenting with new ways to share information. For example, the Seattle Police Department uses a program known as Idea Scale, a feedback forum for communication and collaboration to improve products, processes, organizations, and markets. It allows the agency to send out a policy to officers before it is published, so that officers can provide feedback and spot potential problems with application or training before the policy is finalized. Other agencies use similar programs, such as SurveyMonkey.

While not all ideas are accepted, having input into new policy increases patrol officers' sense of ownership and buy-in. It can also limit dissatisfaction with that policy from those who did not take the time to comment—it is more difficult to be upset with a policy you don't like when you did not take the opportunity offered to provide feedback. Even where agencies are large enough to have officers whose primary function is to write policy, these writers need to be encouraged to get input and feedback from officers on the street, particularly officers familiar with the goals and strategies for effective community policing.

### Strategic planning

The strategic planning process can also be used to improve problem-solving policing, although this is an area where patrol officers' ability to contribute may be limited. Three principles known as the strategic triangle can help bring ideas to fruition: Mission, Stakeholders, and Capacity. An idea must have direction that is communicated in a basic mission statement. There must be support by stakeholders, who could be community members, community-based organizations, mayors, city councils, or other authorizing environments. Finally, there must be the capacity to carry out the mission.<sup>30</sup>

The third prong, Capacity, is particularly relevant to patrol officers, who may need to advocate within the agency to ensure that the necessary technical and logistical support for a proposed plan is available back at the precinct, and that appropriate liaisons are provided to other city departments. It is crucial to the success and credibility of community policing officers that they keep their promises; if a police agency develops a plan and for whatever reason cannot carry it out, patrol officers' work will suffer from the lack of trust this will create.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, budget issues will often require patrol officers to work with their chains of command to find the necessary resources for a particular project.

### Transparency

Transparency in policing can be difficult to achieve. Officers must balance the privacy rights of victims, witnesses, and suspects against the community's need to know what is going on. Meanwhile, social media allows people to expect more information, faster. When there is a lack of information, rumors arise, potentially damaging an agency's reservoir of trust and credibility.

It is important, whenever possible, to empower the public with information to be problem solvers and the first line of defense against crime. We as police officers are stronger when we encourage the public to help us do our job, and when the public is better informed on the job that needs to be done. Simply providing information about calls can often educate the community about the frequency and types of calls patrol officers respond to, giving them a more realistic idea of the demands, difficulties, and dangers of the patrol officer's job.

Agencies can also embrace social media to make announcements regarding calls for service in their communities.<sup>32</sup> This is a unique way to connect with the community without needing face-to-face contact.

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30. Meese, "Community Policing and the Police Officer" (see note 16).

31. Meese, "Community Policing and the Police Officer," 8 (see note 16).

32. Lisa R. France, "Police Departments Keeping Public Informed on Twitter," CNN (March 13, 2009), <http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/03/13/police.social.networking/>.

## Police Engagement on Social Media: Lessons from the Gainesville, Florida Police Department

Following Hurricane Irma (2017), the Gainesville (FL) Police Department (GPD) posted selfies of officers and community members engaged in cleanup and outreach that received positive comments about the officers' work, as well as their good looks. The department responded with a mix of humor and important information about the work of law enforcement and the photo thread went viral. Other agencies from Florida, Louisiana, and beyond posted officer selfies in response, and the playful banter helped to raise funds for recovery in communities impacted by the hurricane.

Officer Ben Tobias, GPD spokesperson, uses social media (Facebook, Twitter) and the Police Beat television show (<http://www.gainesvillepd.org/TV>) in a two-way channel of engagement. "Social media is a balance of content to engage the community, tasteful humor, and relevant information" says Tobias, who is also President of the Florida Law Enforcement Public Information Officers Association (FLEPIOA).

The agency established a Facebook and Twitter account in 2009 but made social media a priority in 2012. Tobias did research on the technology, as well as on his local community, to "understand the digital footprint" of Gainesville. The community includes University of Florida, which has over 50,000 students plus staff and support services and represents about half of the population. However, Tobias stresses that social media is an important part of community relations for any agency. "All our press conferences are streamed on Facebook Live so that citizens can hear everything we have to say, rather than just short clips on the local news."

The GPD contracts with a local production company to produce the monthly Police Beat television show, but Tobias stresses that any agency can use social media. He recommends resources such as the National Information Officers Association and the Public Information Officers Section of IACP, as well as local and state law enforcement associations.

If there is negative response to social media, Tobias has advice for agencies and PIO: "Respond to the group, not the individual. If a post has negative feedback, capture it for public records but remove it from social media, apologize and move on. Focus on relevant information that is important to the community." Trust and a proven track record over time will support use of social media as a communication tool.

### Other best practices for social media

- Build a trusting relationship with the media via regular and open contact.
- Maintain engagement with the community via social media, the agency website, and local news reporting.
- Language use is important; for example, "preliminary" is a key word to use during crisis and emergency situations.
- Use social media to advance agency's long-term community policing strategy.

Source: A version of this article appeared in the October 2017 issue (vol. 10, no. 10) of the *COPS Office Community Policing Dispatch* under the title "Gainesville Police Department: Managing Social Media during Hurricane Relief Efforts."

Social media information is especially valuable when, for example, an accident shuts down a roadway and a tweet allows people to reroute their commutes in real time, or an emergency shuts down schools and a tweet lets parents know quickly about children's safety and pick-up plans. The police also benefit from extra sets of eyes looking out for suspects.

## Personnel

Having the right balance of people and skills in an agency contributes to the expansion and sustainability of community policing. Agencies shape that balance through recruitment, evaluations, and training.

### Recruitment and Retention

Participants at the Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century forum on August 31, 2016 identified the following characteristics of the ideal officer:

1. Analytical
2. A skilled communicator
3. Streetwise and possessing common sense
4. A problem solver
5. A change maker
6. Adaptable
7. Culturally competent
8. Strong advocate for human rights
9. Well-educated
10. Compassionate
11. Visionary<sup>33</sup>

While no one person can be all things to all people, diversity in hiring and recruitment allows patrol officers to learn and depend on each other's strengths.

Patrol officers can encourage innovative hiring strategies, such as eliciting community feedback on hiring decisions through focus groups—sometimes multiple focus groups consisting of sworn officers and citizens—and allowing community participation in some parts of the screening process. Branding and marketing law enforcement careers to highlight community policing will attract candidates interested in community engagement. Patrol officers can also identify and recommend candidates based on their interactions with community groups, youth groups, and other agencies in the social services network.

### Evaluations

We have already discussed some evaluation strategies in the Labor Relations section on page 15. As in hiring, feedback from community focus groups can also be used as part of officer or agency evaluations. The Community Perception Survey<sup>34</sup> and the Community Survey on Public Safety and Law Enforcement<sup>35</sup> are examples of questionnaires that can be used by agencies to evaluate the interactions of front-line staff with the community. The Leveraging Innovative Solutions to Enhance Neighborhoods (LISTEN) program is a smart mediation approach, incorporating procedural justice and principles of responsiveness to address complaints of police bias in Los Angeles County.<sup>36</sup> Mediators are paired with community members who agree to participate in a mediated discussion with police officers regarding an incident of concern; the program has improved trust and communication between Los Angeles police and

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33. James E. Copple, *Law Enforcement Recruitment in the 21st Century: Forum Proceedings* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2016), <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-w0830-pub.pdf>.

34. Institute for Intergovernmental Research, *Building Relationships of Trust: Community Perception Survey* (Washington DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), <https://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0732>.

35. Community Survey on Public Safety and Law Enforcement (Washington DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-w0743-pub.pdf>.

36. Vivian Y. Elliott and Tammy Felix, *Lessons to Advance Community Policing: Final Report for 2014 Microgrant Sites* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2018), <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-w0848-pub.pdf>.

community. It is important to note that community response should only be one of many factors included in annual evaluations and that training opportunities can be used to help officers strengthen communication styles.

### Training

For a community policing program to be successful, training at all levels must reflect the community-oriented approach. However, the DOJ report cautions that training cannot simply mandate new attitudes:

Most important is the approach or “tone” inherent in the revised training. Community policing cannot be imposed from “on high,” but must become a part of the culture of the department, and thus be reflected in significant attitude changes. As one law enforcement agency phrased it, such attitude changes cannot be mandated through policy, but must come about “through a long series of environmental changes that foster behavior modification which consequently alters attitudes.” Officers must understand that community policing helps them to be more effective, that it gives them a greater participation in fashioning their own work environment, and that they, as well as the community, will benefit from the new policing strategy.<sup>37</sup>

Line officers play a major role in training new officers—from basic academy work, through in-service training, and into officer field training. Through these multiple levels, curricula can be developed, and more seasoned officers can model behavior, to maximize new recruits’ exposure to the skills they need to be effective community policing officers. These skills include appropriate use of officer discretion; excellent communication skills; the ability to build trust, partnerships, and sources;

public speaking skills; problem-solving techniques; and conflict-resolution skills. Police departments need to establish a baseline of community policing training for all officers to ensure they obtain the same information and can work together in an effective way.

Many police agencies have developed or contracted for training in procedural justice. The Center for Public Safety and Justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago (CPSJ)<sup>38</sup> has developed procedural justice training for all levels of law enforcement agencies, including front-line officers. But the full implementation of procedural justice requires training for everyone in the agency and a commitment to the core values:<sup>39</sup>

- fairness in the processes
- transparency in actions
- opportunities for voice
- impartiality in decision-making

Professional development training is also important for officers—one example is training for School Resource Officers (SRO). Men and women assigned to schools as SROs are required to engage with youth, provide mentoring and education, work in cooperation with school staff, and coordinate emergency management plans. Without proper training, officers are placed at a disadvantage. This is a topic of special interest to COPS Director Phil Keith: “We don’t ask a teacher to become a police officer and just give them a gun without any training. And we can’t expect an officer to work in a school without getting training on child development and the special responsibilities of SROs.”

### Information systems

Advances in technology have rapidly changed policing over the last twenty years. Improvements in technologies such as crime mapping, automatic fingerprint

37. Meese, “Community Policing and the Police Officer,” 6 (see note 16).

38. “Services: Procedural Justice Training,” Center for Public Safety and Justice, accessed June 5, 2018, <https://cpsj.uic.edu/services-2/>.

39. “Community Policing Topics: Procedural Justice,” Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, accessed June 5, 2018, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=2866>.

systems, and DNA testing have helped police agencies solve more crimes at a faster rate. Many agencies now use data analysis as a primary method of operations and response to crime. The National Public Safety Partnership (PSP) was established in June 2017 under the direction of Attorney General Jeff Sessions in response to President Trump's Executive Order on a Task Force on Crime Reduction and Public Safety.<sup>40</sup> Under the PSP, agencies from all over the United States document methods of data-driven crime response,

### CompStat 2.0 – A Dashboard for NYPD Reporting Data

Many agencies use CompStat, an organizational management tool for police departments. The NYPD developed the original CompStat system in the 1990s as a policing tool that combined crime analysis, geographic information systems technology, and management principles. The system has become a national model for law enforcement agencies and has been credited with reducing crime.\* Compstat 2.0 expands on the original metrics to include such data as community satisfaction, in order to increase community trust through transparency.

In most departments, the system is primarily used by commanders to allocate resources and personnel so that data-driven statistics can be used to better solve crimes and improve quality of life. If your agency uses a CompStat model, it would be useful to explore ways that patrol officers are permitted to use this data to better analyze crime in their areas. This information should also be pushed out to the community. The NYPD makes its CompStat data available on a public website, <https://compstat.nypdonline.org>.

\* "Compstat and Organizational Change: A National Assessment," Police Foundation, accessed June 5, 2018, <https://www.policefoundation.org/projects/compstat-and-organizational-change-a-national-assessment/>.

such as the Violence Reduction Network summits and annual reports, the Analyst Professional Development Road Map, and the Crime Analysis Toolkit.

However, not all of these advances have filtered through to the patrol officer level. Crime analysis technologies, in particular, still need to be fully integrated into patrol and into overall operations in many agencies.

One recent survey showed that as few as 15 percent of patrol officers make use of crime analysis products; that in twenty percent of agencies patrol officers have little contact with crime analysis personnel; that half of police agencies have no mechanism to communicate the impact of crime analysis to officers or analysts; and that analysts infrequently make use of opportunities to better understand the operations and culture of patrol, for example by attending roll call (only 24 percent) or participating on a ride-along with patrol officers (17 percent).<sup>41</sup>

Almost every agency has some type of data collection system, and patrol officers continually write reports that contain key information about crime in their area. Crime analysts and crime analysis technology can sift through these reports to extract information on where, when, and how crime is happening. Such information can be used to create real-time crime mapping or identify emerging hot spots, helping patrol officers deploy themselves more effectively. In addition to tracking real-time events, data can also be used for predictive policing. Predictive policing uses several analytics to anticipate or help predict where crime will occur based on historical data on calls for service and completed police reports.

40. 'Attorney General Sessions Announces Creation of National Public Safety Partnership to Combat Violent Crime,' press release, June 20, 2017, Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-sessions-announces-creation-national-public-safety-partnership-combat>. More information is available at <https://www.nationalpublicsafetypartnership.org/>.

41. B. Taylor and R. Boba, *The Integration of Crime Analysis into Patrol Work: A Guidebook* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2011): 11–13, [http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/e061120376\\_Integrating-Crime-Analysis-508.pdf](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/e061120376_Integrating-Crime-Analysis-508.pdf).

Making full use of this data is another thing patrol officers can advocate for in their organizations. Ask your crime analysts what their specific systems can do. You can then craft ideas for how this information can be used by officers and by the public. The following are some good questions to ask:

- What types of reports can be generated?
- Can the information be broken down to a specific geographic location? Can it be pinpointed in time?
- How can I assist in collecting data in my police reports that is more beneficial for you? What kind of information do you need from patrol officers to obtain statistics that can be used to monitor crime trends in the field?
- How is the information the crime analysts generate being communicated to patrol officers?

Social media can be a useful data source for learning about crime trends and community perception of crime. But social media can also be used as a method to increase transparency and communication between law enforcement and the community, such as the way Boston Police Department officials used social media following the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing—to engage and respond to concerns in the community, but also to contradict unsupported rumors and false leads.<sup>42</sup>

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42. Edward F. Davis III, Alejandro A. Alves and David Alan Sklansky, “Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons from Boston,” Harvard Kennedy School and National Institute of Justice, *New Perspectives in Policing*, March 2014, <https://news.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/social-media-and-police-leadership.pdf>.



# Problem Solving

In the early twentieth century, officers walked a regular beat.<sup>43</sup> This let them engage with the community and understand the dynamics of the issues affecting it. As populations grew and communities expanded, patrol officers were pushed into patrol cars. “Patrol officers lost contact with the residents of their beats who were neither offenders nor victims. Their knowledge of community problems become more and more limited.”<sup>44</sup> Now, as a part of community policing initiatives, agencies are moving back to foot patrol and district assignments.

One of the three principles of community policing is problem solving: “the process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate effective responses.”<sup>45</sup> Problems may be identified by law enforcement or by community stakeholders, but in either case, the public expects the police to solve problems and increase community safety.<sup>46</sup>

## What is Problem-Oriented Policing?

Problem-oriented policing (POP) is an approach to policing in which crime data and calls for service are analyzed to discover more effective policing strategies. Law enforcement implements these strategies, rigorously evaluates their effectiveness, and shares outcomes with other law enforcement agencies. POP focuses on new responses that are preventive in nature, not dependent on the use of the criminal justice system, and that engage other public agencies, stakeholder groups, and the community.

For instance, if a string of burglaries consistently use the same modus operandi, a patrol officer might analyze the burglaries and create a plan of action to make an arrest. From a community policing perspective, problem-oriented policing allows the patrol officer to reduce or eliminate issues that could cause harm to the community.

A problem-oriented approach begins with assessing agency priorities in a given geographic area, such as districts or sectors defined by the community or the law enforcement agency. First responders use a triage system during an incident so they can get the most impact from their resources. Problem-oriented policing can apply the triage concept to problem areas in order to determine which issues should be addressed first or given the largest share of resources.

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43. Robert C. Trojanowicz and Bonnie Bucqueroux, *Community Policing: How to Get It Started*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1998), 2.

44. Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, *Community Policing: How To*, 19 (see note 44).

45. *Community Policing Defined* (see note 1).

46. Michael S. Scott, *Problem-Oriented Policing: Reflections on the First 20 Years* (Washington DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000), <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-w0687-pub.pdf>.

In problem-oriented policing, officers are assigned to a specific district (or sector) to improve communication between law enforcement and the community members. Officers learn about the residents and businesses and become familiar and trusted individuals who can respond to calls for service but also help to address larger issues identified by the residents. For example, as officers engage with business owners and managers, they may hear repeated complaints about traffic issues that cause congestion.

Some police agencies have specialized officers whose specific assignment is to focus on problem-solving strategies for their department. Many agencies refer to them as community policing teams (CPT) or community resource officers (CRO). The struggle for some agencies, however, is determining what projects are patrol officer's responsibilities and what projects should be assigned to the CPT Officers. This confusion leads patrol officers to believe that problem-solving projects are the responsibility of CPT officers. It is important for each agency to develop a formal tier system to triage problem-solving projects and, for maximum success, to involve both patrol and the CPT officers in these projects.

### **The tier system**

The tier system can be used to quickly evaluate problem-solving issues ranging from vandalism to drug houses and gang violence by sorting them into tiers according to three criteria: (1) priority of the issue, (2) length of time of the project to address the issue, and (3) the size of the issue. A patrol officer who has an extremely busy district might feel reluctant to take on a large-scale project for a variety of reasons. This priority system will help officers judge their ability to handle a situation.

With budget cuts, many agencies have reduced or eliminated CPTs. The tier approach will help agencies use all of the agency's staff with the appropriate capacity or skills to handle situations; it is flexible, suitable for use by well-rounded generalists or by officers that specialize in problem-solving policing.

The first tier of problem response encompasses projects that a single effective patrol officer can address in the short term—that is, in one to three months—using resources limited to four or five different partnerships, units, or other agencies that can be around to assist. The priority of the issue can be relatively low, as with property damage, theft, or civility issues.

For example, speeding around school zones might be a first-tier project. One simple solution could be to move traffic officers into the area and educate or change behavior through traffic tickets, but this requires the long-term commitment of a traffic officer to the location. Instead, the patrol officer assigned to the area could work with the school principal, school PTA, and local neighbors to find a solution. Other partners might be a city or state department of transportation, which might be able to post road signs or assist in putting in speed bumps. The patrol officer's role is to facilitate these connections in the local community. Coupled with regular traffic enforcement, this community assistance can make a long lasting impact without intensive time commitment.

The second tier of problem response includes projects that require a specialist officer or supervisor to assist or oversee on a timeline of up to a year. Projects on this scale require much greater coordination of resources, assessment, and documentation, as well as data analysis to understand the effectiveness of the project during the response period and in follow-up.

Examples of this type of project include the abatement of a known drug house or of a bar or club that regularly sees violence when patrons are leaving. A single patrol officer might not have the time to devote to such a project, or might not be able to reconcile a shift schedule with engaging with both the problem—such as 2 a.m. bar fights—and the resources to address it, such as daytime meetings of a partner organization. But even though it is necessary to have a specialized officer coordinating resources, it is still important for patrol officers to be continuously involved, as they will be the ones dealing with any problem that arises. Patrol officers need to make sure

reports are written documenting any issues with implementation. They can assess the effectiveness of the project and help to evaluate whether the problem is resolved or has been displaced to another place in the community.

The third tier comprises collaborative, community governance projects. These require more internal allocation of resources, including assistance from command levels, policy changes, staff redistribution, or budget adjustments; externally, they require extensive partnerships with other city agencies, civic organizations, businesses, and the community. Third-tier projects usually have a timespan of no less than one year and require long-term sustainability strategies from all partners and city agencies.

Projects of this scale are usually initiated by the leadership of the city, county, or state, which engage agencies to work together to address a community problem with sustained effects on safety or well-being. Typically a patrol officer would not be able to start a project of this magnitude—it requires extensive command staff experience, partnerships with city agencies, and networking across many different sectors.

In the mid-1990s, Anaheim, California, experienced a tremendous problem with gangs, narcotics dealers, and opportunistic criminals preying on a small apartment neighborhood in the city. People in the neighborhood were shot, stabbed, and robbed on a regular basis. To combat the problem, the City of Anaheim assigned six officers and one sergeant to use traditional enforcement tactics. They made numerous arrests, but the issues persisted. The Anaheim Police Department realized they needed a different approach, one of collaboration, involving other city departments and the community. They designed and implemented a plan that saw a crime reduction of almost 80 percent. Their efforts were tracked, and it

became clear that results did not come strictly from law enforcement efforts, but also from the contribution of other city departments and the community. This community governance approach breaks down organizational and communal barriers by enlisting everyone to work as a team in solving problems.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after taking office in 2013, Sheriff Gerald Couch of Hall County, Georgia developed a new community safety. Previously, when citizens would come to report crimes, the records office would need to call in a patrol officer, who was pulled from their beat for up to two hours. The Hall County Sheriff Office (HCSO) created community resource officers (CRO), based on the same concept as school resource officers (SRO). The HCSO now have CROs stationed at the north and south ends and the center of the county to address the special needs that patrol may not be able to address and to coordinate with patrol in each of those districts. In addition to taking crime reports, the officers interact with community members on a regular basis at community events, cookouts, and parades. The CROs also check on elderly citizens and respond to special problems. These officers have built trust, and residents want to talk with officers they know—the CROs they have seen at local events and stationed in their local community. The CRO position has grown over time since its inception, and now these deputies also handle social media and other forms of outreach.<sup>48</sup>

### The SARA model

After triaging based on the tier system, an officer then can start looking at how to address the issue. The most prevalent and effective strategy for problem-solving policing is known as the SARA model. SARA is an acronym for Scan, Analyze, Respond, and Assess: a four-step process to help patrol officers approach an issue.<sup>49</sup>

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47. Joe Reiss, "Community Governance: An Organizational Approach to Fighting Crime" NCJ 214299, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 75, no. 5 (May 2006): 8–11.

48. "School Resource Officers (SRO) and Hall County Student Safety," *Community Policing Dispatch* 11, no. 5 (May 2018), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/05-2018/SROs.html>.

49. *Community Policing Defined*, 10–12 (see note 1).

## Scan

Scanning consists of identifying and prioritizing a problem. It is similar to the tier system's initial triage process. Patrol officers might learn about a problem from their sergeants, through information from the community, or by responding to a call for service. Once the immediate problem is noted, any or all of the following steps may occur:<sup>50</sup>

- Identifying recurring problems of concern to the public and the police
- Identifying the consequences of the problem for the community and police
- Prioritizing those problems
- Developing broad goals
- Confirming that the problem exists
- Determining how frequently the problem occurs and how long it has been taking place
- Selecting problems for closer examination

These steps can be reduced to three broad questions:

- What is the problem?
- How did I become aware of this problem?
- Who does this affect?

Asking and answering these questions allows the officer to describe the issue specifically, ensure it is a recurring problem, and determine how broad the problem is and who has a vested interest in making change. These answers will lead to identifying both stakeholders and the potential to create partnerships. Having a basic knowledge of a community is necessary to establish partnerships and to define the scope of a problem.

For example, an officer might respond to numerous 911 calls from a person who believes someone is inside their house. After a quick assessment, the officer

concludes the person calling suffers from a mental illness. The first step is to determine what the immediate problem is—has there been a break-in, or is the caller mistaken or delusional? The answer to each question will lead to more questions; for example, if there was no break-in and the caller is experiencing a mental health crisis, do they have a mental health practitioner or case worker who could help? Are they a danger to self or others? Do they have access to guns?

## Analyze

The next stage of the SARA model, and the one that can be the most important for patrol officers, is analysis. This might involve any of the following steps:<sup>51</sup>

- Identifying and understanding the events and conditions that precede and accompany the problem
- Identifying relevant data to be collected
- Researching what is known about the problem type
- Taking inventory of how the problem is currently addressed and the strengths and limitations of the current response
- Narrowing the scope of the problem as specifically as possible
- Identifying a variety of resources that may be of assistance in developing a deeper understanding of the problem
- Developing a working hypothesis about why the problem is occurring

For example, a community may be experiencing a high volume of thefts from retail locations. The more specifically you can break down data on the thefts—perhaps calling on your department's crime analysis unit—the more it can tell you. If calls for service start at or after 2:30 p.m. and the local school lets out at 2:20 p.m., this suggests a place to start, but more specific data can point to more targeted strategies of response. If one business only reports thefts on one day of the

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50. "The SARA Model," Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, accessed August 7, 2017, [www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara](http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara).

51. "The SARA Model" (see note 51).

week, that could be the day off of a particular worker who is able to successfully deter theft during her shifts, and the solution is for her to train the other workers in loss prevention. If another business has had a specific object targeted, the store's layout might be making it especially easy to steal, and an officer could help resolve the problem simply by recommending more secure locations to display the products.

Many existing models for data analysis can be used at this stage of the SARA process. In our hypothetical theft scenario, the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)<sup>52</sup> model could provide more feedback than just the statistics of time and place: using it to analyze the location could reveal overgrown shrubbery or lack of lighting in the area that make it a more appealing place to commit crime. CPTED is a multi-disciplinary approach for reducing crime through urban and environmental design, as well as the management and use of built environments. CPTED is used by various private and public sector organizations and has become integrated in comprehensive school safety planning to design or retrofit campuses across the country.<sup>53</sup>

The patrol officer does not require CPTED training, but can rely on community partners or stakeholders to assist with an assessment, or in developing an assessment that allows the most pressing issues of their community to be addressed and measured.

After the analysis, the original questions of the scanning step should be revisited. Should the problem be reprioritized? Do new stakeholders need to be involved? If the problem is redefined sufficiently, you will have to go back to the scanning stage.

## Respond

After scanning and analyzing the problem, the next stage is to respond to it. Responses encompass both creating a plan and carrying it out. Response is the

area that requires the most flexibility, because sometimes a plan must be adjusted if problems start to arise. It may involve any of the following steps:<sup>54</sup>

- Brainstorming for new interventions
- Searching for what other communities with similar problems have done
- Choosing among the alternative interventions
- Outlining a response plan and identifying responsible parties
- Stating the specific objectives for the response plan
- Carrying out the planned activities

As a patrol officer, this area can be difficult to navigate if you are not given the authority to make decisions and to change them as the situation evolves. You want to ensure you keep the chain of command apprised of what is going on; however, the chain of command should ensure the patrol officer has the flexibility to allow for miscalculations and adjustments to changing circumstances.

When developing a plan, set up timelines with goals attached. Intermediate goals help ensure the project has small, concrete successes. If the goals are set too far out it can be difficult to keep the motivation for the project going; specific benchmarks, however, keep the energy going and allow for constant adjustment.

It is also important that the response plan isn't just limited to patrol officers, but involves other agencies and partnerships that can provide support. These may include other city departments that can provide law enforcement capability, such as on code enforcement or public health issues.

## Assess

Assessment is the last stage of the SARA model. Patrol officers use on calls for service as an indicator of change. However, traditional measures are not the only indicators to rely on. For example, using the CPTED

52. *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Guidebook* (Singapore: National Crime Prevention Council, 2003), <http://www.popcenter.org/tools/cpted/PDFs/NCPC.pdf>.

53. More information is available at the website of the International CPTED Association, <http://www.cpted.net/>.

54. "The SARA Model" (see note 51).

can give you an idea of some of the visual changes. Surveying businesses or community members can assist in determining the success of a project. The Center for Problem Oriented Policing recommends any or all of the following assessment steps:<sup>55</sup>

- Determining whether the plan was implemented (process evaluation)
- Collecting pre-and post-response qualitative and quantitative data
- Determining whether broad goals and specific objectives were attained
- Identifying any new strategies needed to augment the original plan
- Conducting ongoing assessment after the fact to ensure continued effectiveness

Or, more briefly:

- Does the problem still exist?
- If so, has it been reduced, or is there a noticeable positive impact in the area?
- Did the problem or the solution create an unintended consequence in a different area?
- If another issue has come out then how can the project be flexible to address another issue?

People want to know their tax money is being spent wisely and that police departments are developing real outcomes that make communities safer. This is why budget offices and community groups have begun to push for using evidence-based systems to solve crime—and why the assessment process is so important.

Most problems a community might face have been tackled by other police agencies—or even by others within their own department. Reach out to other personnel for advice, or use the resources from the COPS Office or the Center for Problem Oriented Policing.

Conduct research on methods community organizations have tried, as well. Law enforcement is not the only tool to solve longstanding issues. Sometimes it is just a matter of helping the community build the capacity to solve the issues themselves. The police department can simply be an influential force leading to change.

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55. “The SARA Model” (see note 51).

# Conclusion

The practice of community policing continues to evolve and adapt to the changes in our communities, but the elements continue to be the same: partnerships, problem solving, and organizational transformation. All of these areas require the buy-in and support of every officer—especially patrol officers.

As patrol officers, we find ourselves directed to patrol geographic areas, know our beats, but at the end of the shift—or the end of a 30-year career—what do we hope to accomplish? In the end, we hope our careers may have been impactful, maybe changed someone’s life, or made the community safer for one particular day—in other words, to have solved problems in our communities.

While all police officers have different backgrounds or experiences that have drawn them to policing, the calling to serve is a common bond. For every officer, commander, or chief, we are reminded of our first experience on the street as a patrol officer: the experience of not wanting the shift to end. How do we translate this love and passion for the job into transforming the organization to support and sustain the philosophy of community policing? Critical to an effective strategy for the delivery of police services is a central mission around which the whole enterprise may coalesce. Addressing both the root causes of crime and delinquency, as well as solutions to complex systemic issues, community policing represents a holistic approach to the delivery of police services, addressing crime and disorder in our community.

# About the Author

**Assistant Chief Adrian Diaz's** career with the Seattle Police Department spans more than two decades, beginning in Patrol. He has served with the Bike Unit, as an undercover officer with the Anti-Crime Team, and on the Investigations Bureau. Before assuming his current position, he was the Aide to the Chief of Police, overseeing the Community Outreach Section. Diaz holds a B.A. in criminal justice from Central Washington University and a Master's in Public Administration from the University of Washington; he is also a Master Defensive Tactics instructor at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission.

Assistant Chief Diaz has been the architect of several citywide youth violence reduction initiatives and was instrumental in setting up the department's partnership with the ATF Puget Sound Crime Gun Task Force. He has authored numerous publications in community policing and juvenile justice.

# About the COPS Office

**The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to provide training and technical assistance, enhance crime fighting technology, and add more than 130,000 officers to our nation's streets. COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).



Community policing makes different demands at different levels of an organization. This publication, *Community Policing: A Patrol Officer's Perspective*, and its companion volume, *A First-Line Supervisor's Perspective*, illustrate how individual officers and supervisors can implement community policing practices in their agencies. It contains examples of officer-led problem solving and relationship building and guidelines for understanding community policing concepts and practices.



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