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**VICTORIA
POLICE**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN
2013-2015

March 1st, 2013

CHIEF CONSTABLE'S MESSAGE

It is my pleasure to present a new community engagement strategy for VicPD.

Communicating to the public, the media, stakeholders and our own members, employees, volunteers, and families is of the highest importance. At its core, this communications effort should simply amplify the work that our men and women do every day for our community.

The need to sustain a meaningful dialogue with our citizens is the principal reason why I combined our Public Affairs function with Crime Prevention Services in July 2012. Under the guidance of the Director of Public Affairs and Crime Prevention Services, this unified group of community engagement experts now works more closely together to engage the public in a coordinated, consistent, and sustained way.

Community engagement activities are too important to conduct in a haphazard manner. Therefore, this three-year strategy establishes objectives and community engagement themes that directly support the achievement of our five "bold steps" that are outlined in our *Strategic Plan 2020*.

This is a strategic-level plan, and accordingly, it does not go into details associated with operational and tactical-level plans related to specific messaging and detailed tasks. Instead, it lays the foundation upon which all operational communications efforts should be built.

I am incredibly proud of VicPD and I want everyone to have an opportunity to hear about the remarkable work that our department does on a daily basis. Our best spokespeople, bar none, are our members themselves. Everyone at VicPD, regardless of rank or work assignment, should seek to be involved in this most worthwhile endeavour. Only then can we reach our community engagement objectives.



Jamie Graham
Chief Constable

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRIORITIES

All VicPD community engagement activities must be aligned with our strategic vision to be Canada's safest region by 2020. As articulated in our *Strategic Plan 2020*, this will be achieved by:

- Enhancing Operational Effectiveness;
- Developing the Best;
- Improving Communication;
- Regionalizing Public Safety; and
- Building Capacity Through Relationships

VicPD community engagement programs will be aligned with these strategic priorities to ensure that unity and cohesion are evident in all our activities. They will also be governed by the department's Crime Prevention Policy (OM40), Public Affairs Policy (AA90), Social Media Policy (AC200), and our Media Relations Protocol. Finally, community engagement efforts will complement and support, whenever possible, our departmental Crime Reduction Strategy.

While community engagement is a department-wide priority at VicPD, primary responsibility for this strategy lies with the Director of Public Affairs and Crime Prevention Services, who leads:

- Public Affairs (media relations, social media, community events, speakers' program, the VicPD.ca website, and internal communications);
- The Reserve Constable program;
- The Crime Free Multi-Housing program;
- The Volunteer program; and
- The VicPD Block Watch program.

THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Policing remains one of the most respected professions in Canada. A December 2011 Ipsos Reid poll ranked police officers as the sixth most trusted profession in the country. On a regional level, a December 2010 EKOS survey indicated that 82% of British Columbians had confidence in their local police. Our own VicPD 2007 Community Survey of Victoria and Esquimalt indicated that 84% of respondents found VicPD officers to be approachable, 71% perceived officers as being courteous and polite and, overall, 80% were satisfied with VicPD in general.

In terms of media coverage, VicPD is consistently one of the primary sources of news in the region. Crime reporting is a cornerstone of most local mainstream news organizations, and several of these outlets have reporters who specialize in covering police and crime. While most VicPD-related news coverage is local in nature, many stories have regional implications and some are of national importance. The VicPD Public Affairs Section has a good relationship with local media and routinely engages with them on a transparent and mutually respectful basis.

LIMITATIONS

Public Affairs and Crime Prevention Services exist to support operations. No community engagement activity will jeopardize officer safety, operational or tactical details, privacy laws, or the integrity of an investigation.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this strategy is to expand the breadth and depth of VicPD's dialogue with the citizens of Greater Victoria in order to enhance public safety and awareness of VicPD's priorities and operations. All VicPD community engagement efforts should have these three main objectives:

- 1) Highlight our partnership with the community.** Everyone, including police agencies, individuals, and businesses, have a role to play in public safety. The continued emphasis on this cooperative relationship reminds citizens of the importance of strengthening their ties with VicPD to ensure safer communities. Informing our communities about the myriad roles, responsibilities, and crime reduction strategies that we undertake on their behalf is an obligation that we must better fulfill.
- 2) Link VicPD activities to our *Strategic Plan 2020*.** Our strategic plan is the roadmap for the future of VicPD and our operational initiatives should be explained within the broader context of this strategic plan. The document does not need to be described in detail by VicPD spokespeople, but rather referred to as the foundation for all of our operational priorities and activities.

TASKS

As a result of an analysis of VicPD priorities, strategic goals, and the public, media, and operating environments, three primary tasks have been identified that will enable VicPD to achieve its community engagement objectives:

- 1) **Communicate directly with the public;**
- 2) **Conduct media relations; and**
- 3) **Communicate with “the VicPD family.”**

TASK 1: Communicate Directly With The Public

The most effective and lasting form of communication is face-to-face engagement. In an era of “information overload” and media saturation, it is difficult to get and hold the attention of an individual or group long enough to convey meaningful information that has a reasonable chance of being retained. As a result, it is critical that VicPD place significant emphasis on creating opportunities to directly interact with the citizens of Greater Victoria. Due to the nature of VicPD’s mandate and operations, the opportunities for engagement are virtually limitless. It could be argued that every interaction we have with a member of the public is an outreach opportunity.

Most of our interactions with members of the public occur as a part of our mission of enforcing the law and upholding public safety. Therefore, it could be argued that many of our daily interactions with the public do not occur under circumstances that are “positive” for the citizens involved. This is simply a function of them being subject to the enforcement of the law. For example, few people who receive a speeding ticket or are arrested for impaired driving are going to fondly reflect on that interaction with police.

But there is a tremendous opportunity embedded in this challenge. The vast majority of citizens in Greater Victoria have never met a VicPD officer. It is precisely this “silent majority” that could benefit the most from knowing who VicPD is, what we do, and how we can improve the safety of their communities. Communicating with groups that have a low level of awareness regarding VicPD and its missions, roles, and tasks will likely increase understanding and support for VicPD activities.

The following community engagement initiatives should be employed:

- 1) ***VicPD should continue to reach out to both traditional and non-traditional audiences online.*** Efforts will be made to increase direct contact with residents via our social media efforts. VicPD multimedia content has developed a significant online following and will remain a cornerstone of VicPD’s ongoing community engagement efforts. The new VicPD website, for example, conveys the theme of “working together to create the safest region in Canada” and challenges citizens to get involved in public safety issues.

- 2) ***Volunteers, Reserve Constables, Community Resource Officers, and School Liaison Officers have a central role to play in community engagement.*** These groups are active in the community on a daily basis and interact with countless citizens in Victoria and Esquimalt on an annual basis. Within the constraints of their availability and mandate, these groups have a major role to play in:
- a) Crime prevention education, including participation in public consultations, school presentations and business liaison activities;
 - b) Collection of valuable public opinion information about VicPD through formal (i.e. community surveys) and/or informal means; and
 - c) In general, be one of the visible “faces of VicPD” that exudes professionalism and dedication to the community.
- 3) ***The Block Watch program offers a ready-made network through which crime prevention and public safety information can be distributed.*** With 4,704 homes in 224 blocks throughout Victoria and Esquimalt, the Block Watch network should be more routinely engaged as a means to connect with the community.
- 4) ***Highlight VicPD Personnel.*** Most citizens in Greater Victoria are proud of the work undertaken every day by the men and women of VicPD. At every opportunity and as soon as possible after the event, VicPD should seek to have the contributions of our personnel appropriately recognized. Similarly, VicPD should seek to thank citizens who directly contribute to public safety. Acts of outstanding service will continue to be honoured through our Recognition Committee, but instantaneous opportunities for public recognition should also be considered. A major step forward in this respect was achieved in August 2012 when the VicPD Civic Service Award program was launched, which recognizes acts of civic service on the part of VicPD members and citizens alike.
- 5) ***Highlight the historical role VicPD has played in the evolution of Victoria and Esquimalt since 1858.*** Our rich heritage forms an important element of the history of this region, this province, and this country. Every opportunity should be seized to tell our story, especially through the VicPD Historical Society’s Museum.
- 6) ***Seize every opportunity to reach out to the community through speaking engagements.*** For many people, hearing someone from VicPD speak at a business luncheon, university seminar, or community association event may be their first interaction with us. In order to ensure that we are making the most of such opportunities, the VicPD Public Affairs section will oversee the VicPD Speakers Program and will coordinate all speaking engagements that are undertaken by our personnel. The goal of the Speakers Program is make sure we have the right person

speaking at the right event with the right messaging. Only then can we ensure that we are delivering the VicPD message in the most consistent and professional manner possible.

- 7) ***The volunteer and charity work of VicPD members, the VicPD Athletic Association, the Victoria Police Mutual Benevolent Association, and the Victoria City Police Union deserves greater attention.*** Every effort should be made to highlight these often thankless community outreach efforts.

TASK 2: Conduct Media Relations

With few exceptions, VicPD is a significant source of news for local media outlets every day. Each month, hundreds of stories are generated by local media that relate to VicPD operations, initiatives, and personnel. Today's journalists file stories around the clock and are expected to cover a wide range of media and subject matter. As a result, one of the roles of VicPD Public Affairs staff is to serve as a bridge between the department and the media, which can be achieved in two ways:

- 1) **Proactively engaging media on planned public safety themes.** Instead of communicating reactively, VicPD will proactively engage media on public safety themes that reflect the department's operational priorities and, by extension, the activities of the Crime Prevention section. VicPD Public Affairs staff will continue to respond to the routine needs of the media but their main effort will be in support of deliberately planned proactive media opportunities that highlight the public safety priorities identified by the VicPD Operations Council and the Director of Public Affairs and Crime Prevention Services.
- 2) **Timely, effective and coordinated media responses.** VicPD has a progressive media relations policy that allows members of VicPD to speak to the media regarding their jobs and their areas of expertise. While routine "incident-related" media interviews can be undertaken by appropriate officers, it is critical that sensitive "issue-related" requests are referred to our Public Affairs staff as they may need to coordinate similar requests that require significant consultation.

TASK 3: Communicate with "the VicPD Family"

Communicating with our personnel is a leadership responsibility that should be given the highest priority. Collective wisdom and academic research both indicate that a well-informed workforce is happier, more productive, and more committed to their employer and clients. This same commitment should be made to the wider "VicPD family" – retired members, volunteers, Reserve constables, and family members of VicPD personnel.

To that end, the VicPD Public Affairs team will continue to support all efforts to improve internal communications by:

- 1) **Engaging our personnel.** We must work to improve the frequency and relevance of information being made available to our officers and civilian staff. Once successful, we will have a better informed workforce that understands the department's priorities and how we will achieve them.
- 2) **Engaging retired members.** Retired members of VicPD have consistently voiced a desire to be better informed of our activities and priorities. They have also shown interest in playing a larger role in VicPD activities, especially volunteer opportunities associated with the VicPD Historical Society, our museum, and commemorative and community events. Addressing this gap is not only the right thing to do, it would result in a better informed cadre of retired officers who occasionally speak publicly on policing issues.
- 3) **Engaging VicPD family members.** Many of our families have only the most basic information about the roles and activities of VicPD. While members and staff will continue to be the main source of information for their respective families, more work could be done to share general departmental information with our families.

MAIN EFFORT

The main effort will be focussed on the first main task (communicating directly with members of our community) and more specifically, communicating the three main VicPD objectives: highlighting our partnership with the community, demonstrating VicPD relevance to the community, and linking VicPD activities to our *Strategic Plan 2020*.

DEFINING SUCCESS

We will know that this community engagement plan has succeeded when:

- 1) The people of Greater Victoria have a greater understanding of VicPD via regular contact with our personnel, media coverage, the Web, social media, and speaking engagements; and
- 2) Our officers and staff are regularly updated with relevant departmental information via a wide variety of means including face-to-face engagements, a revamped Intranet site, and other internal communications methods.

ACTION PLAN

VicPD community engagement activities will occur simultaneously to achieve all tasks. The implementation of certain objectives and activities will be sequenced, however, to manage available staff effort and resources.

The following table summarizes the specific activities that will be undertaken to support our three main tasks, most of which have been discussed in depth within this document:

	<u>Task 1:</u> <i>Communicate Directly With The Public</i>	<u>Task 2:</u> <i>Conduct Media Relations</i>	<u>Task 3:</u> <i>Communicate with the VicPD Family</i>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight our partnership with the community - Link VicPD activities to <i>Strategic Plan 2020</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proactively engage media on public safety themes - Timely, effective and coordinated media responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage our personnel - Engage retired members - Engage VicPD family members
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing community engagement on the part of Volunteers, Reserves, Community Resource Officers and School Liaison Officers - Speakers program - Promotion of the VicPD Museum - Highlight VicPD personnel - Community event displays - Social media efforts - Professional-quality VicPD videos and photography - Strategic plan updates - Briefings to the Police Board and Victoria and Esquimalt Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - News conferences - News releases - Interviews - Issue-specific media opportunities - Social media efforts - Highlight VicPD officers and staff - Strategic plan updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Departmental emails - Newsletters - Renewed intranet site - Renewed internet site - Social media efforts - Renewed communications with retired members

RESOURCES

The initiatives outlined in this community engagement plan will be achieved within the existing Crime Prevention Services/Public Affairs budget and personnel allocation.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

We will measure our progress toward our goals through media analysis, direct stakeholder feedback, and member feedback. Community surveys, administered by Volunteers and Reserve Constables, will allow VicPD to measure perceptions of public safety over time, as well as the effectiveness of policing efforts.

CONCLUSION

Over the past few years, VicPD has made great strides in its ability to communicate both externally and internally. Of course, we can always do better. This community engagement plan provides a roadmap for focussed and sustained public dialogue over the next three years. VicPD must extend its reach to new and existing audiences, focus on proactively communicating key themes, and strengthen and expand its relationships with media and stakeholders.

Bringing this vision from concept to reality will require a concerted effort from across our department. The people of Greater Victoria want to be informed of the activities of VicPD and our personnel deserve to be recognized for their ongoing efforts to make this the safest region in Canada by 2020.