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COPS

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Community Policing for Mayors:

A Municipal Service Model for Policing and Beyond



By:

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As the Mayor, You Can Propel the Move Toward a More Effective Model of
Government Service that Produces Results!

What Is Community Policing...

Community policing focuses on crime and social disorder through the delivery of police services that includes aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as prevention, problem-solving, community engagement, and partnerships. The community policing model balances reactive responses to calls for service with proactive problem-solving centered on the causes of crime and disorder. Community policing requires police and citizens to join together as partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing these issues.

...and What Should It “Look” Like?

Many local leaders and community members ask if their agency is a community policing agency. A common lament—and in reality a widespread misperception—is that community policing sounds great in concept, but in practice is vaguely defined. In fact, the specific operational activities that are consistent with and support community policing are clear and well known. Although policing is a diverse profession that is practiced differently throughout the nation, the chances are that your agency already possesses and promotes many practices that directly support community policing principles. Common strategies include conducting citizen surveys or other means of outreach to help identify what crime and disorder problems are priorities for citizens. Or, where appropriate, using citizens and community groups to assist in the actual responses to community problems, when they can increase the effectiveness of the solution. Many agencies use citizen volunteers, geographically deploy police based on sound analysis and research, systematically analyze crime problems, and identify and apply best practices from other jurisdictions. There are hundreds of other examples, but these are just a few well-recognized and commonly practiced police activities that are at the core of what community policing is about. One challenge confronting many communities and law enforcement agencies is systematically linking these activities to the broader framework provided by community policing and implementing the organizational and cultural changes necessary to maintain and enhance them.

One of the strengths of community policing is its flexibility and the variation of tools within the community policing toolbox. It is important, however, that the philosophy not only be embraced, but also practiced, throughout an organization. Department-wide adoption of community policing is substantiated by the integration of the philosophy into mission statements, policies and procedures, performance evaluations and hiring and promotional practices, training programs, and other systems that define an organizational culture and activities. The organizational systems, for example, recruitment and selection systems and performance appraisal processes, should support and value a service orientation, and represent the importance of well-defined and operational community policing principles. Although implementation of the community policing philosophy may occur incrementally and within specialized units at first, experience tells us that many of the most successful approaches lean toward a carefully planned department-wide implementation. All personnel can play a vital role in creating partnerships and using proactive problem solving strategies to address crime and disorder issues.

How Does Community Policing Integrate with Traditional Policing Strategies?

The community policing model balances reactive responses to calls for service with proactive problem-solving centered on the causes of crime and disorder. Community policing requires police and citizens to join together as full partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing these issues. In these respects it is very different from traditional models of policing that focus primarily on response times and responding to crimes after they occur. As seasoned police practitioners will tell you, however, do not make the mistake of thinking of community policing as “soft” policing. It is simply a model that takes the best and most effective traditional strategies and incorporates them into thoughtful problem solving and community partnerships to most effectively leverage nonpolice assets and develop longer term solutions to problems. Rather than community policing, many simply refer to it as “smarter” policing.

Exactly How Does This Relate to a Broader Government Service Model?

Chances are, if your police agency practices community policing, you have seen the potential that these strategies possess for addressing community issues of all scales. Tremendous assets and expertise exist within other municipal agencies in your city; accordingly, the police may even routinely and systematically work with other municipal agencies—in the same way that they engage prominent nonprofit service providers, business leaders, and the community at large—to identify and respond to citizen concerns. If so, this represents a more seamless municipal government service model that can be highly effective in addressing community issues and increasing citizen satisfaction. It is also what underpins the community governance movement.

While some call this approach community governance, others simply refer to it as a more coordinated approach to providing city services and solving community problems. The police are only one of the many local government agencies responsible for responding to community problems as varied as traffic, litter, street lighting, or problem parks. Under a community governance model, based on community policing principles, other government agencies are called on and recognized for their abilities to respond to and address citywide issues. Community based organizations are also brought in to address issues of common concern. The support and leadership of elected officials, as well as the coordination of the police department and other municipal agencies at all levels, are vital to the success of these efforts. Organizational and cultural changes can take place in all of these agencies to promote proactive public service models based on the basic principles of partnerships and problem-solving.

...And What Are Some Ways That I Can Promote This Model?

Community policing is not just for the police. Elected officials have an important role to play, in close coordination with their law enforcement executive, to make the community policing philosophy and the strategies it encourages work best and potentially expand beyond law enforcement. Your administration likely has dozens of partnerships with members of the business community, faith-based organizations, community groups, nonprofit groups, victim service providers, health service providers, the media, individuals, and other city agencies. You can also promote a more coordinated approach to these partnerships across your municipal agencies, ensuring that they are strategic and structured to identify and deal with specific problems that are relevant to all members. It is vital to include those government agencies that have a stake in the outcome, and can bring resources to bear on the development and implementation of jurisdiction-wide solutions.

As the chief executive, you can facilitate and provide leadership to your public service executives to join into partnerships when their participation is warranted. You can encourage and provide funds for the growth of interconnected technology and information systems across government to facilitate the sharing of information to better understand and develop effective solutions to problems. You can also provide, or advocate for, necessary resources to sustain these partnerships, as well as support the implementation of their proposed solutions. Moreover, you can use your influence to encourage participation from important segments of the community, through direct contact with key stakeholders, or media access to promote and provide information regarding these partnerships. Your leadership is critical to moving toward a public service model based on the principles of community policing that will ultimately provide for more coordinated services and safer and livable communities.

A Sample of Common Community Policing Strategies

For community policing to work best, these (and other) individual strategies should be linked by a broad organizational commitment to the community policing philosophy.

| Community Partnership | Organizational Change | Problem-Solving |
|--|---|---|
| Post crime information on police web sites | Assign officers to specific geographic locations for extended periods | Conduct community surveys to identify problems and evaluate performance |
| Hold regular meetings with local businesses | Build principles into recruitment activities and selection decisions | Systematically identify problems at all levels (block, beat, neighborhood, and city) |
| Attend and present at homeowners association meetings | Incorporate community policing into performance evaluations and reward systems | Use problem analysis/crime analysis to better understand problems/issues |
| Build working relationships with the media | Develop technology and data systems that make information more accessible to officers and the community | Examine and incorporate best practices from other agencies |
| Inform citizens about major police initiatives | Train all staff in community policing principles | Seek input from members of the community to identify and prioritize problems |
| Use citizen volunteers | Increase officer discretion and accountability for solving problems at their level | Encourage and enable officers to think about problem-solving when responding to calls for service |
| Operate a citizen police academy | Encourage officers to propose innovative solutions to long-standing problems | Evaluate the effectiveness of crime and problem reduction efforts |
| Develop working partnerships with other local government departments | Reduce hierarchical structures | Examine the causes for crime hot spots and develop appropriate responses based on underlying conditions |
| Get feedback from partners about the nature and priority of community problems | Increase agency transparency for activities and decision-making | Analyze factors and characteristics of repeat victims to support targeted interventions |
| Brainstorm new solutions with stakeholders | Incorporate community policing into field officer training | Gather information about repeat offenders to make future offending more difficult |
| Involve community partners and service providers in problem-solving processes | Give officers latitude in developing innovative responses to problems | Conduct surveys of the physical environment of problem locations to make places less susceptible to crime |
| Use foot patrol/bike patrol | Develop technology systems that support problem analysis and evaluation | Develop formal response plans |
| Use partners to help implement responses to problems | Build community policing into mission/vision/strategic plans | Systematically document problem solving efforts in a database |

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