## ⊗↺ COMMUNITY POLICING

Community policing may be the most important development in policing in the past quarter century. Across the country, police chiefs report that they are moving toward this new model of policing, which supplements traditional crime fighting with problem-solving and prevention-oriented approaches that emphasize the role of the public in helping set police priorities. What police departments are doing when they do community policing varies a great deal. Agencies point to a long list of projects as evidence that they are involved. These range from bike and foot patrols to drug awareness programs in schools, home security inspections, storefront offices, and citizen advisory committees. In some places, community policing is in the hands of special neighborhood officers, whereas in other places, it involves the transformation of the entire police department. In some cities, residents participate in aggressive neighborhood watch patrols as part of their city's program, although in many more places, public involvement is limited to being asked to call 9-1-1 quickly when they see something suspicious. Agencies have mounted sophisticated public relations campaigns to sell their programs, and they compete hotly for national awards for innovation. Assistant chiefs get promoted, and chiefs move to more visibly prominent cities because they are said to have made a success out of community policing.

So, what is community policing? Although it is often described by the things that police officers do (including the examples just mentioned), community policing is actually a strategic rather than programmatic innovation. Its advocates characterize it as transforming the "professional" model of policing that has been dominant since the end of World War II, shifting in a fundamental way to one that is proactive, prevention oriented, and community sensitive. It seems to mean different things to different people because the range and complexity of programs with which it is associated are large and continually evolving. At root, however, community policing is not defined by a list of particular tactics. In its fullest expression, community policing affects the structure and culture of police departments, not just their activities. Police departments embracing community policing tend to adopt at least three new, interrelated organizational stances: They involve the community, they decentralize, and they adopt a problem-solving orientation. In turn, these changes reverberate back, reshaping the mission and methods of policing.

### Community Involvement

Community policing is defined in part by efforts to develop partnerships with groups and individual community members. These are intended to help the police to better listen to the community, enhance constructive information sharing, build trust with

the public, and involve them in setting public safety priorities. Police need to reorganize in order to provide opportunities for citizens to come into contact with them under circumstances that encourage these exchanges. To this end, departments hold community meetings and form advisory committees, establish storefront offices, survey the public, and create informational Web sites. In some places, police share information with residents through educational programs or by enrolling them in citizen-police academies that give them in-depth knowledge of law enforcement. This is one reason why community policing is an organizational strategy but not a set of specific programs—how it looks in practice should vary considerably from place to place, in response to local circumstances.

Civic engagement usually extends to involving the public in some way in efforts to enhance community safety. Community policing promises to strengthen the capacity of communities to fight and prevent crime on their own. The idea that the police and the public are "co-producers" of safety, and that they cannot claim a monopoly over fighting crime, predates the current rhetoric of community policing. In fact, the community crime prevention movement of the 1970s was an important precursor to community policing. It promoted the idea that crime was not solely the responsibility of the police. The police were quick to endorse the claim that they could not solve crime problems without community support and assistance, for it helped share the blame for crime rates that were rising at the time. Now police find that they are expected to lead this effort. They are being called upon to take the lead in mobilizing individuals and organizations around crime prevention. These efforts include neighborhood watch, citizen patrols, and education programs stressing household target-hardening and the rapid reporting of crime. Residents are asked to assist the police by reporting crimes promptly when they occur and cooperating as witnesses. Even where these ideas are well established, moving them to center stage as part of a larger strategic plan showcases the commitment of the police to resident involvement.

Another important set of partnerships involves relationships with other organizations that have direct responsibility for the quality of neighborhood life. This includes the schools and agencies responsible for health, housing, trash pickup, graffiti cleanups, and the like. Effective community policing requires responsiveness to citizen input concerning the needs of the community. It takes seriously the public's definition of its own problems, and this inevitably includes issues that lie outside the traditional competence of the police. Officers can learn at a public meeting that loose garbage and rats in an alley are big issues for residents, but some other agency is going to have to deliver the solution to that problem.

## Decentralization

Decentralization is an organizational strategy that is closely linked to the implementation of community policing. Decentralization strategies can be twofold. More responsibility for identifying and responding to chronic crime and disorder problems can be delegated to mid-level district commanders. Departments have had to experiment with how to structure and manage real decentralization that gives mid-level managers real responsibility, and how to hold them accountable for measures of their success. Here, community policing intersects with another movement in policing, one toward a culture of systematic performance measurement and managerial accountability. At the same time, more responsibility for identifying and responding to community problems may be delegated to individual patrol officers and their sergeants, who are, in turn, encouraged to take the initiative in finding ways to deal with a broad range of problems specific to the communities they serve. Dual decentralization is adopted not only so that police can become more proactive and more preventive, but also so that they can respond efficiently to problems of different magnitude and complexity. Under the professional model, marching orders for the police have traditionally come from two sources: calls from the public concerning individual problems, and citywide initiatives or programs originating at police headquarters or even City Hall. They are not organized to respond to the groups and community institutions that make up "civil society." Decentralization, paired with a commitment to consultation

and engagement with local communities, allows the police to respond to local problems that are important to particular communities.

Structurally, community policing leads departments to assign officers to fixed geographical areas and to keep them there during the course of their day. This is known as adopting a "turf orientation." Decentralization is intended to encourage communication between officers and neighborhood residents, and to build an awareness of local problems among working officers. Line officers are expected to work more autonomously at investigating situations, resolving problems, and educating the public. They are being asked to discover and set their own goals, and sometimes to manage their work schedule. This is also the level at which collaborative projects involving both police and residents can emerge. Usually, community policing departments attempt to devolve authority and responsibility further down the organizational hierarchy, to facilitate decision making that responds rapidly and effectively to local conditions. The goal is to encourage the local development of local solutions to locally defined problems, whenever possible. In this, the police are not independent of the rest of society, for large organizations in both the public and private sectors have learned that decentralization can create flexibility in decision making at the customer contact level. Often, there are also moves to flatten the structure of the organization by compressing the rank structure, and to shed layers of bureaucracy within the police organization to speed communication and decision making.

### Problem Orientation

Community policing also involves a shift from reliance on reactive patrol and investigations toward a problem-solving orientation. Problem-oriented policing is an analytic method for developing crime-reduction strategies. It stresses the importance of discovering the situations that produce calls for police assistance, identifying the causes that lie behind them, and designing tactics to deal with these causes. This involves training officers in methods of identifying and analyzing problems. As a strategy, problem solving represents a departure from the

traditional approach to policing, which too often was reduced to driving fast to crime scenes in order to fill out paper reports of what happened. Rather than just responding sequentially to individual events, problem solving calls for recognizing patterns of incidents that help identify their causes and how to deal with them.

Problem-solving policing can proceed without a commitment to community policing. A key difference between problem-solving and community policing is that the latter stresses civic engagement in identifying and prioritizing a broad range of neighborhood problems, whereas the former frequently focuses on patterns of traditionally defined crimes that are identified using police data systems. Problem-oriented policing sometimes involves communities as a means to address particular issues, but more often it is conducted solely by specialized units within the police department. On the other hand, community policing involves communities as an end in itself. Problem-oriented community policing also recognizes that the solutions to chronic problems may involve other agencies and be fundamentally "nonpolice" in character; in traditional departments, this would be cause for ignoring them. Because community involvement tends to expand the definition of police responsibilities to include a broad range of neighborhood problems, this requires, in turn, that police form partnerships with other public and private agencies that can join them in responding to residents' priorities.

### New Mandates and Methods

Important features of community policing flow from decentralization, community involvement, and adoption of a problem-solving orientation. These almost inevitably lead to an expansion of the police mandate. Controlling serious crime by enforcing the criminal law remains the primary job of the police. But instead of seeing the police exclusively in these terms, and viewing activities that depart from direct efforts to deter crime and bring offenders to account as a distraction from their fundamental mission, advocates of community policing argue that the police have additional functions to perform and different ways to conduct their traditional business.

They argue that the crime control and security-enhancing effectiveness of the police might actually be strengthened by recognizing the importance of different police functions rather than focusing solely on reducing crime by threatening and making arrests.

Better listening to the community can produce different policing priorities. Officers involved in neighborhood policing quickly learn that many residents are deeply concerned about problems that previously did not come to police attention. The public often focuses on threatening and fear-provoking conditions rather than discrete and legally defined incidents. Often, they are concerned about casual social disorder and the physical decay of their community rather than traditionally defined "serious crimes," but the police are organized to respond to the latter. Community residents are unsure that they could (or even should) rely on the police to help them deal with these problems. Thus, these concerns do not generate complaints or calls for service, and as a result, the police know surprisingly little about them. The routines of traditional police work ensure that officers will interact mostly with citizens who are in distress because they have just been victimized, or with suspects and troublemakers. Accordingly, community policing requires that departments develop new channels for learning about neighborhood problems. And when they learn about them, they have to have systems in place to respond effectively.

New thinking about the ends of policing also includes the idea that police should provide "quality service" to the taxpayers who employ them. Traditionally, quality service meant fast, courteous response to calls for service. Now, for example, it has grown to encompass the role of police in providing information, practical advice, and counseling, and referring callers to public and private agencies that are able to assist them further with their problems. Attention to the "bedside manner" of the police was first driven by the movement for better care for crime victims, but developing a customer orientation is now a touchstone of public sector organizations of all kinds. Police have also gotten into the "fear reduction" business. Reducing fear is now being seen as important in its own right,

but promoting the reclamation of public spaces and the exercise of effective informal social control, as well as fostering public cooperation in crime reporting by getting people to step forward as witnesses, can also enhance the crime control effectiveness of the police.

Community policing also has driven new interest in crime prevention, altering the means of policing as well as the mission. Under the professional model, crime prevention was deterrence based. To threaten arrest, police organized themselves to patrol the streets looking for crimes (random and directed patrol), respond to emergency crime calls from witnesses and victims (rapid response to 9-1-1 calls), and find guilty offenders (criminal investigation). But concerned residents do not want the crime that drives these efforts to happen in the first place, and their instinct is to press for true prevention. Police-sponsored prevention projects are in place throughout the country. Problem solving has brought crime prevention theories to the table, leading police to tackle the routine activities of victims and the crucial roles played by "place managers," such as landlords or shopkeepers, and not just offenders. An emphasis on target hardening has gotten them involved in conducting home security surveys and teaching self-defense classes. But when communities talk about prevention, they mostly talk about their children and ways of intervening earlier with youths who seem on a trajectory toward serious offending. Much of the work preventing the development of criminal careers lies with agencies besides the police, such as family courts, child protection agencies, parents, peer networks, and schools. To their efforts, the police add involvement in athletic and after-school programs, D.A.R.E. presentations in schools, special efforts to reduce violence in families, and initiatives that focus attention on keeping youths out of gangs.

## UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

One unanswered question about community policing is whether it can survive the withdrawal of federal financial support and attention. Under the 1994 Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act, the federal government spent billions of dollars to support

community policing. Federal agencies sponsored demonstration projects designed to spur innovation and promote the effectiveness of community policing. Another federal bureau promoted it in a series of national conferences and publications. The largest agency funded tens of thousands of new positions for police officers. The Act specified that one of the roles of these new officers should be "to foster problem solving and interaction with communities by police officers." Innovations such as community policing highlight the importance of training for officers, and the Act also funded the creation of regional community policing centers around the country. By 1999, 88% of all new recruits and 85% of serving officers worked in departments that were providing some community policing training. Many police departments also applied for technology support grants under the Act. The goal of this program was to release sworn officers from office jobs and increase their efficiency in the field by employing information technology and hiring civilian technical staff to support it.

The issue is whether police departments will continue to expand and staff their community policing components. Federal financial support for community policing certainly will be on the wane. Now, crime is down, and federal largess toward local law enforcement is being redirected to post-September 11th concerns. Even where commitment to community policing is strong, maintaining an effective program can be difficult in the face of competing demands for resources. Community policing continues to ask officers to think and act in new and unaccustomed ways, and many of its presumed benefits do not show up in police information systems. Community policing will need continued community support.

The second question is whether community policing can live up to its promises. Like many new programs, its adoption in many instances preceded careful evaluation of its consequences. The effectiveness of community policing has been the subject of some research, ranging from its impact on crime to how openly it is embraced by the officers charged with carrying it out. There has not been enough research to definitively address the effectiveness

question. It is clear that implementing a serious community policing program is risky and hard, and departments can fail at it. Surveys and ethnographic studies find that officer buy-in is both critical and difficult to achieve, and that problem solving does not come naturally to many police officers. Ironically, research also finds that community support for community policing cannot be assumed. Residents have to be motivated to get involved, and to keep them involved requires evidence of accomplishment. Cities also have a history of not following through very well on promises made in poor and disenfranchised communities, and residents there have to be convinced that "this time, it is for real."

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*See Also* Theories of Policing

## For Further Reading

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