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Are You Really Doing Community Policing?

By Professor Brian Stipak, Department of Public Administration, Portland State University; and Susan Immer and Maria Clavadetscher, Research Assistants, Portland State University, Oregon

Fifty percent of American police departments claim they are now "doing" community policing, and another 20 percent say they plan to start doing it soon.[1] But how do you *do* community policing? And, more importantly, how do you *know* you are doing community policing? These questions were asked as part of a project funded by a grant from the National Institute of Justice to the Portland, Oregon, Bureau of Police. After carefully studying the community policing literature, the authors developed a description of what a department ideally has to do to implement community policing, as well as a written tool—similar to a questionnaire—to help a department assess its own level of community policing effectiveness.

How Do You Do Community Policing?

Knowing if you are doing community policing requires that you understand what it is. In contrast to the traditional approach to policing, with its emphasis on rapid response to 911 calls, random automobile patrols and separation between the jobs of patrolling and investigation, community policing emphasizes solving crime and addressing livability problems in mutual partnerships with citizen groups and other agencies. Community policing is a management strategy

that promotes the joint responsibility of citizens and police for community safety, through working partnerships and interpersonal contact.

The difficulty facing police administrators who want to move from traditional policing to community policing is how to make the transition. To paraphrase an adage, adding a new label to an old procedure doesn't make it a new procedure. If a department does not adequately implement the elements of community policing, its transition is incomplete.

Unfortunately, the literature is vague in defining a transition plan.[2] Many writers have advocated the community policing philosophy in general, and others have described how to set up specific individual components like foot patrols or mini-stations. However, police administrators who want to move their entire department towards community policing need more concrete guidance. Without a specific outline, many police organizations may be unsure what the process actually involves.

To help administrators make this transition, this article first presents a management blueprint for guiding a police department toward full implementation of community policing. This blueprint contains the essential building blocks described in the community policing literature as critical to community policing. This article also presents a written self-assessment instrument, similar to a questionnaire, that police administrators can use to measure the degree to which community policing procedures have been implemented throughout their own departments. We call this written tool an "implementation profile" since the results

provide a profile of the agency's relative strengths and weaknesses in fully implementing community policing.

Our blueprint involves five major requirements for transitioning to community policing: building partnerships with the community, building partnerships within the department, decentralizing decision-making, restructuring training and education, and going beyond 911.

Building Partnerships with the Community

The first priority for any police department implementing community policing is to redefine the way it relates to the people outside the police organization. The goal is for police, citizens, media, civic officials and representatives from other agencies to relate as partners in maintaining community safety. This requires the police to become more inclusive of others and less insular, and may require them to initiate the partnerships.

Police must candidly communicate to citizens an accurate vision of the community policing philosophy. People must understand that there will be different police processes, that everyone will have new responsibilities and that there will be distinct tradeoffs in future resource allocations. It is a police responsibility to guide citizens toward understanding and accepting their new partnership role.

A major aspect of true citizen partnership revolves around real two-way communication, consisting of genuine problem-solving dialogues. For instance, at police-citizen group meetings, the police will ask the group to prioritize its safety concerns. Then both police and citizens

will follow through on those concerns in tangible ways. A written partnership agreement that formally describes specific responsibilities is visible documentation of this teamwork.

Partnerships must also be forged with other community entities. From the beginning, elected and appointed civic leaders need to be included in community policing planning. Throughout the planning process, police leaders—in briefings, prepared materials and informal dialogues—shc· ld constantly emphasize the expected rewards and consequences of community policing. This will help civic leaders to develop an understanding of and commitment to community policing. Following the planning process, these leaders should all be able to confidently answer the following questions: What is community policing? What are the potential benefits, the transition risks, the expected outcomes? How much does it cost? What can I do to further its implementation?

Likewise, the staff of relevant community agencies should be partners in the planning process. By meeting in non-crisis situations and routinely exchanging information, police and social service agencies will enhance their understanding of each other's role. One measure of the degree of problem-solving coopera-

Rather than viewing the media as adversaries, the police should consider media representatives as allies, ready to publicize police policy and enhance public understanding of police procedures. The media can also facilitate a valuable public awareness of the complexities of police work.

tion is the number of referrals police employees make to each agency, and the percentage of each agency's intake that

comes from those police referrals.

A new partnership also needs to exist with the media. Rather than viewing the media as adversaries, the police should consider media representatives as allies, ready to publicize police policy and enhance public understanding of police procedures. The media can also facilitate a valuable public awareness of the complexities of police work. The police communication style should be factual, open and accepting of appropriate responsibility. It should avoid the "us versus them" and "we followed the book" rhetoric. All members of the department should be free to speak directly to the press about their own areas of expertise or their own patrol territory. Police policy should stipulate only that officers and staff speak in a professional manner, stick to facts and avoid political and internal disputes.

Building Partnerships within the Police Department

No doubt the most important partnership to develop is within the police department itself. To successfully implement community policing, police departments need to encourage a new spirit of cooperation in the ranks and an invigorated department-wide team spirit. As

Community Policing Implementation Profile

Complete the following profile questionnaire to analyze the degree that different community policing activities are integrated into your police agency and community. For each activity listed below, circle a number between 1 ("not implemented") and 5 ("fully implemented") to indicate the degree that you feel that the activity is currently implemented.

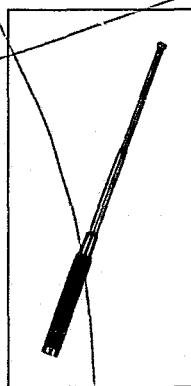| Build Partnerships With the Community	Not Implemented			Fully Implemented	
1. Police communicate the community policing philosophy through news media, community newsletter or citizen meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Police discuss with citizens what community policing can do and cannot do.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Police at all organizational levels participate in two-way communication with citizens and community leaders.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Police use each neighborhood's own public safety priorities to guide department activity in that neighborhood.	1	2	3	4	5
5. A partnership form documents joint department and citizen group responsibilities concerning specific problem-solving activities.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Police include elected officials in the community policing planning process.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Police involve relevant community agencies in the community policing planning process.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Police coordinate problem-solving activities with appropriate social service agencies.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Police and community agencies track police social service referrals.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Police distribute an information package that gives a realistic picture of community policing.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Top police managers conduct press briefings to explain community policing.	1	2	3	4	5
12. All police personnel are authorized to speak directly to the media about their work.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Police personnel have organized an internal speakers bureau to promote community policing.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Police sponsor public seminars on community policing.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Individual employees participate in civic groups trying to solve crime problems.	1	2	3	4	5

Build Partnerships Within the Police Department	Not Implemented			Fully Implemented	
16. Frequent personal communication from top management disseminates community policing philosophy to all personnel, sworn and nonsworn.	1	2	3	4	5
17. All personnel participate in community policing planning processes that affect their own work.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Management recruits people who respect community policing values.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Management seriously considers the merits of all internal suggestions for improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Employees are rewarded for doing community policing activities.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Employees help design their own performance evaluation criteria.	1	2	3	4	5

Decentralize Police Decision-Making	Not Implemented			Fully Implemented	
22. Management practices emphasize broad-based participation in policy formation.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Problem-solving groups are composed of many different ranks.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Problem-solving groups have the authority to implement their decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
25. The police general rules and regulations have been streamlined to emphasize broader guidelines to appropriate action.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Management practices are consistent with the large amount of individual discretion that patrol officers exercise.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Patrol officers accept having increased accountability along with increased decision-making authority.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Management has reduced the rank level of approval required for many decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Management authorizes officers to commit police resources when working with citizen groups to solve problems.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Patrol areas conform to natural community boundaries.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Officers who work in the same neighborhood areas attend frequent meetings with each other to plan their problem-solving activities.					

Restructure Police Training and Education	Not Implemented			Fully Implemented	
32. Management works to change state police academy curriculum to teach more community policing skills.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Department training emphasizes community policing skills.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Management rewards patrol officers who take outside courses that help them to do community policing.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Department policies encourage managers to take outside courses in participatory management skills.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Management uses citizen complaints about police conduct to identify training deficiencies.	1	2	3	4	5
37. Management uses patrol officers who are successful in community policing to help train other officers.	1	2	3	4	5

Go Beyond 911	Not Implemented			Fully Implemented	
38. The department emphasizes using an alternative phone number to 911 for non-emergency police contact.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Citizens are provided a method to directly contact their neighborhood patrol officers.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Police employees have accurate information for correctly referring citizens to other agencies for problem-solving assistance.	1	2	3	4	5
41. The department uses alternatives to automobile patrols.	1	2	3	4	5
42. The method for evaluating the performance of police officers includes monitoring officers' progress on self-generated problem-solving plans.	1	2	3	4	5

the team leader, the chief should communicate on as personal a level as possible. Through written memos and small group meetings, he can keep the commitment to community policing from being diluted by uncooperative middle ranks. Top management must avoid what Sparrow *et al.* found in *Beyond 911*:

> Not one of the departments we visited ... failed to reveal both chiefs more or less confident of the progress and popularity of their reforms, and quantities of officers adamantly and colorfully opposed. ... The chief executive can believe that the whole force is busy with the ideas that last month he or she asked a deputy to ask captains to implement, while in fact the sergeant is telling his or her officers that the latest missive from those cookies at headquarters, who have forgotten what this job is all about, shouldn't actually affect them at all.[3]

To foster personal commitment to community policing processes, all employees —civilian and sworn—should be involved in planning for changes that could affect their daily work. Reward systems and informal recognition should begin to emphasize new skills such as mediation, problem-solving, creative use of tools and resources, and achieving personal goals. As befits true team members, employees should help design their own evaluation criteria and goals.

Of course, these ideas about internal team-building efforts are not new; indeed, they have been successfully implemented in private business for many years as part of total quality management. When implemented in a police department, these employment practices can demonstrate management's sincere dedication to restructuring the police organization in keeping with community policing values.

Decentralizing Police Decision-Making

Partnership requires that those newly enlisted to help solve problems be vested with decision-making authority. In community policing, the patrol officer is expected to initiate appropriate neighborhood safety solutions, which should not require the approval of lieutenants or captains not directly involved. Decentralizing the decision-making process recognizes the reality that good patrol work demands individual decision-making.

Under community policing, the main role of management and specialized units is to support the front line, rather than to keep officers from making mistakes. This means treating officers as responsible professionals and not trying to prescribe their every possible decision option in voluminous "general orders." It means valuing individual initiative that is grounded in reasonable action, and tolerating the occasional mistakes that will occur. It means allowing officers to commit not only themselves but also other appropriate public resources to problem-solving efforts.
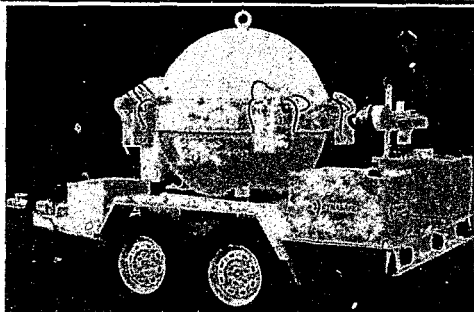
Of course, employees do not act totally independently, without supervision or controls. Decentralized decision-making merely replaces a top-down decision structure with a broad-based participatory process. Teams that are closest to the problem should address it, discuss strategies and decide on actions. In decisions that affect the entire department, like streamlining the general orders or reviewing internal suggestions, the teams should involve multiple ranks. In neighborhood patrol areas, the officers who have adjoining districts and shifts should meet regularly as a problem-solving team.

Restructuring Police Training and Education

People are any police organization's largest investment and greatest potential asset. An active commitment to training personnel in community policing skills not only maintains the department's in-
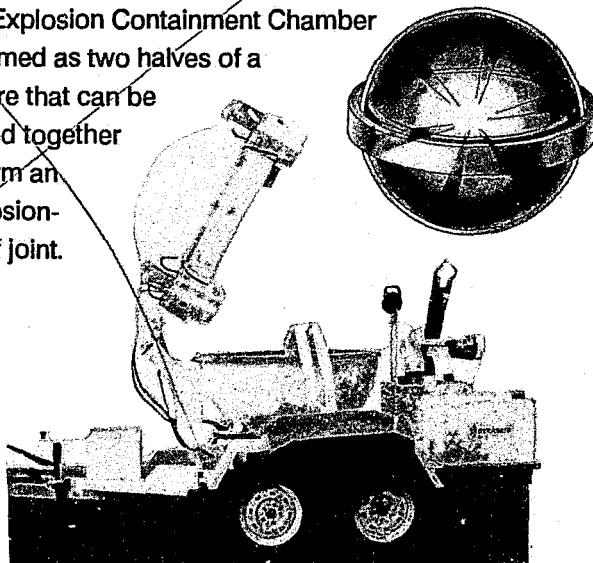
vestment, but also develops the employees' potential talents. The department's return on this investment is an organization of well-informed professionals practicing creative thinking, critical analysis and cooperative problem-solving.

Management initiative is the key to restructuring training. Police chiefs should lobby state police academies to change their curriculum to teach more community policing skills. While influencing the academy takes time and affects only future recruits, changing a department's in-service training can reach the current police force. An excellent internal mechanism is to use experienced community policing officers as trainers and mentors. A complementary approach is to have veteran officers share their knowledge in informal training sessions. Finally, management can use citizen complaints to identify important training, recruiting and management deficiencies.

Restructuring also means broadening the definition of relevant training. College courses and other professional development experiences that help officers do community policing should be promoted. Management should provide support for officers studying a range of topics, including communications, group behavior, conflict management, computer skills and cultural diversity. Supervisory and administrative ranks should also seek training in leadership, organizational systems, total quality management and other management skills.

Going Beyond 911

Studies have revealed that typically 40 to 80 percent of a patrol officer's time is spent in uncommitted patrol, and that 95 percent of dispatched calls do not require immediate response.[4] These findings imply that patrol officers have discretionary time that could be better utilized, and that most calls do not need a rapid patrol-car response. Therefore, police departments need to establish new procedures for citizens to report non-emergency situations. In other words, police departments must go beyond the traditional 911-initiated system of citizen-police contact.

A non-emergency alternative should be established. Whenever possible, citizens should talk to real people, not to machines asking for messages. This alternative number should be extensively publicized and promoted, with clear explanations of its purpose and use. It should be prominently displayed in the telephone book beside 911. Police should persuade the media to promote the number as public service information.

Several other means should be employed to improve non-emergency interaction between police and citizens. Departments should establish methods for

With the assistance of the implementation profile, an innovative police chief can open communication channels and further the transition to community policing.

citizens to directly call their own neighborhood officers, such as dedicated cellular phones or voice mail.

Another non-emergency device is a community resource guidebook, developed cooperatively with other community agencies. Ideally this pocket-sized guide should alphabetically index—and cross-reference by problem or function—all pertinent government and non-profit agencies and services. By training all employees in its use, the department will establish an informed network to supply citizens with problem-solving referrals. This guide should ensure that people receive accurate information, like current phone numbers and addresses of other agencies, and that they are referred to the right agencies for their problems.

Police and citizen interaction should be further developed by making full use of alternatives to the automobile patrol. Foot patrols, bicycle patrols, horse patrols and walking canine teams will all bring officers out from the anonymous patrol car and into direct contact with neighborhood citizens. Such contact is a key step to cooperative problem-solving, which in turn is a basic tenet of community policing.

Finally, any long-term improvement in community policing requires detailed tracking of officer activities. The ultimate goal is to understand how outcomes of increased public safety relate to officer activities. The first step toward this goal is to revise the officer status codes to include more specific community policing activities. Computerized codes should reflect time spent initiating citizen contacts, participating in cooperative problem-solving meetings, following up on prior incidents or casual information and monitoring trouble spots in their patrol districts. The second step is to correlate these activities to measurable outcomes. The third step is to actually use this information to stop doing ineffective activities and to expand effective activities.

Using the Implementation Profile

The written implementation profile instrument recognizes that community policing implementation is a long-term, on-going process, one that has degrees of accomplishment.

The profile could be completed by three different groups of police personnel, each of which can contribute distinct information toward revealing an accurate profile. First, the chief might privately use the profile instrument to assess how thoroughly he thinks community policing is implemented. As the top administrator, the chief is in the best position to know the big policy picture.

The second group could be a broader management panel of deputy chiefs, captains and lieutenants who report to the chief. Asking these managers to complete the profile as a group could encourage a probing dialogue about the degree to which they find each item implemented. From this dialogue, a management plan could be developed to strengthen those areas of weakest implementation.

Finally, a third group consisting of sergeants, officers and non-sworn personnel could complete the profile analysis. Their responses could provide a reality check between management's perceived level of community policing implementation and the front-line employees' actual level of support and use. This third group might also reveal implementation problems that are external to the department, like uninterested or uncooperative citizens.

By using the implementation profile in this way, the innovative police chief can open communication channels and further the transition to community policing. First, the feedback from all those completing the profile promotes real employee involvement in participatory management. Second, the process provides information for assessing the department's current implementation efforts and directing future plans. This information can help police departments close the gap between the widely discussed values of community policing and the nitty-gritty details involved in transforming a traditional police department. ★

[1] Personal communication from Robert Trojanowicz. These figures are from a recent national survey of police departments for cities of 50,000 or more population.

[2] One recent publication that does provide some detail about how to transition to community policing is *Community Policing: How to Get Started* by Robert Trojanowicz and Bonnie Bucqueroux (Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing Co., 1994).

[3] Malcolm K. Sparrow, Mark H. Moore and David M. Kennedy, *Beyond 911* (New York: Harper Collins Pub., 1990), p. 147.

[4] Sparrow *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 47; Stephen Mastrofski, "Police Knowledge of the Patrol Beat: A Performance Measure," in Richard R. Bennett, ed., *Police at Work: Policy Issues and Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983).