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Community Policing Beyond the Big Cities

**U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs**

810 Seventh Street N.W.

Washington, DC 20531

John Ashcroft

Attorney General

Deborah J. Daniels

Assistant Attorney General

Sarah V. Hart

Director, National Institute of Justice

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Community Policing Beyond the Big Cities

Less than 10 years after the 1994 Crime Act set community-oriented policing in motion, two-thirds of U.S. local police departments and 62 percent of sheriffs' offices have full-time personnel performing community policing.¹ Much has been written about community policing in the Nation's major cities, but community policing has also been implemented in smaller cities and rural counties. A recent study sponsored by the National Institute of Justice examined community policing in these areas. Researchers worked closely with eight law enforcement agencies in small- to medium-sized cities and surrounding rural districts

that were implementing community policing (see "Law Enforcement Agencies Studied").²

The study focused on innovative problem-solving initiatives and how these can progress to more advanced stages of community policing. Some insights emerged that are relevant for administrators, planners, and policy-makers:

- Community policing was most successful when front-line officers tried innovative approaches directed at specific local problems in tandem with residents and members of the community.



This summary is based upon "COPS: Innovations in Policing in American Heartlands," by Marcia R. Chaiken, Ph.D., final report to the National Institute of Justice (2001), available at <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/grants/194604.pdf>. Dr. Chaiken is Director of Research at LINC, an interdisciplinary criminal justice and social policy research center in Ashland, Oregon.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES STUDIED

California

- Eureka Police Department
- Humboldt County Sheriff's Office
- Redding Police Department
- Shasta County Sheriff's Office

Idaho

- Pocatello Police Department
- Bannock County Sheriff's Office

South Dakota

- Rapid City Police Department
- Pennington County Sheriff's Office

- The police chief or sheriff must be fully committed to community policing and drive its implementation, or it will not take hold, let alone advance.
- Departments that reached the higher stages of community policing were also supported by local elected officials that were committed to its success.

Researchers identified five progressive stages of community policing. These can be useful guidelines for evaluating a department's progress in implementation (see exhibit 1). The key to advancing through these stages appears to be winning the support of local and State policymakers and civic leaders.

Only one jurisdiction in the study was considered to have reached the highest stage. Police officials in that city worked closely with local and county officials to incorporate such community policing initiatives as addressing neighborhood blight and youth programs into the jurisdiction's annual strategic plans.

The study found that strong "topdown" leadership commitment not only legitimizes community policing in the

eyes of line officers, but also fosters innovation that breaks through entrenched local problems.

Innovative strategies

There is no one right way of implementing community policing. Approaches can be as diverse as the communities in which they are implemented. Many of the problems faced by officers in small- and medium-sized cities are similar to those in large cities.

Thus, the initial strategies adopted by the cities and other communities in the study were fairly standard, such as providing storefronts within problem neighborhoods and increasing officers' face-to-face contacts with business owners and residents.

Strategies became more innovative, however, as officers formed problem-solving liaisons with residents, community groups, schools and youth organizations, and/or other government agencies—for example:

- In an area where youth skateboarding on sidewalks and streets was a problem,

officers led the community in transforming a vacant lot into a skateboard park. Results were not only increased safety, but also improved relations between the police and the community.

- One county sheriff’s office cooperated with police and the courts to create the position of Juvenile Court Deputy. This deputy serves on a daily basis as liaison with the court, police, schools, and juvenile probation. Results were improved communications and coordination between agencies and police and

improved services for youths.

- Another sheriff whose jurisdiction includes a tribal reservation worked closely with county criminal justice system agencies to help the community and tribal police address such chronic problems as domestic violence. Results were empowerment of the tribal police through cross-deputizing and the forging of alliances between tribal and county agencies.
- One jurisdiction held cross-agency weekly meetings to review incidents of

Exhibit 1. Progressive stages of community policing

Stage	Police activities
1	Establishing a special unit, neighborhood center, or other community policing initiative. Community policing is handled as special assignments, not part of regular patrol. Departmental priority remains rapid response to citizen requests.
2	Getting the community more involved. Outreach and targeted response to reduce high rates of particular crimes in particular neighborhoods are departmental priorities.
3	Solving problems through coordination and cooperation. Officers collaborate with residents on short-term projects to address specific local concerns. Problem-solving initiatives are given priority.
4	Broadening collaboration to prevent crime and delinquency. Cross-agency/ communitywide coalition plans of action include police. High priority is placed on collaboration through long-term programs.
5	Institutionalizing community policing in city and county strategic planning. Community policing activities are practiced throughout the department. Priority is given to sustained, community-based approaches.

delinquency and the status of students involved. Results were a reduction in school expulsions by more than half and a more than fivefold reduction in expulsions for assaults.³

Community policing and sheriffs

Many sheriffs' jurisdictions include disparate communities such as small incorporated towns and pockets of remote but densely populated unincorporated areas (e.g., trailer parks or upscale suburbs of vacation homes). Strategies that work in cities may not be feasible in such jurisdictions as Shasta County, California, where the sheriff polices 3,850 square miles with 49 sworn officers. Yet, rates of demand for police services in these areas can be similar to demand in urban areas.

Two strategies used by sheriffs in the study stood out. In the first case, the sheriff selected three widely distant towns for concentrated problem solving. Officers were required to live in or near the town and work directly with residents to solve local problems. In the second case, no

special assignments were made by area—the sheriff made it clear that applying innovative forms of community policing throughout the county was an integral part of the job. Here, problem-solving approaches worked well in dealing with the frequent jurisdictional issues that arose between county deputies and tribal law enforcement officers.⁴

Advanced community policing

In advanced stages of community policing, officers have gained the confidence of community leaders and elected officials as well as community residents. This, in turn, encourages them to develop innovative cooperative projects with other criminal justice agencies, local businesses, and faith-based organizations. Chiefs and sheriffs who advanced to higher stages tended to use budget negotiations with local officials as opportunities not only to promote their department's accomplishments, but also to develop collaborative initiatives.

At the highest stage, community-oriented policing is institutionalized within the department, the community, and as part of city and county strategic planning.⁵ Sustained support from city, county, and State decisionmakers is an essential element of that success.

3. See Chaiken, M.R., "COPS: Innovations in Policing in American Heartlands," final report to the National Institute of Justice, 2001, NCJ 194604: 47. A similar approach in another jurisdiction is discussed on p. 52.

4. For descriptions of sheriffs' community policing activities and their approaches to improve officer morale and performance, see *ibid.*: 19–21; 31; 34–35; 37; 45; 50–51; and 56–57.

5. For a detailed discussion of how departments overcame internal and external barriers to achieve higher stages of community policing and some of the results within their jurisdictions (e.g., reduction of citizen complaints), see *ibid.*: 72–76. Outcomes for specific activities undertaken during the study are discussed throughout the report.

Notes

1. "The 1994 Crime Act" refers to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, Public Law 103-322. For more information on the prevalence of community policing, see *Community Policing in Local Police Departments, 1997 and 1999*, February 2001 (Revised March 2003), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 184794, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/cplpd99.htm>.

2. These agencies participated in a locally initiated research partnership (LIRP) sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The LIRP program, which ran from 1995–98, fostered collaboration between local police and researchers. For more information, see McEwen, T., "NIJ's Locally Initiated Research Partnerships in Policing—Factors That Add Up to Success," *National Institute of Justice Journal* 238 (January 1999): 2–10, NCJ 180068, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/journals/jr000238.htm>.

Additional reading

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