Implementing Community Policing: A View from the Top

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Over twenty years ago Wilson and Kelling authored their oft-quoted essay on “Broken Windows,” a work that helped to set the stage for the implementation of community-oriented policing. While much debate has occurred about its definition, measurement, and impact, community-oriented policing has slowly gained acceptance by law enforcement and the community. During the decade of the 1980s community policing struggled with its identity and to some degree, its survival. With the 1990s came unprecedented Federal funding, growing media coverage of community policing success stories, and increased police awareness of its political, public relations, fear-reduction, and crime prevention benefits. As the 21st century unfolds, community policing appears to have attained a strong foothold in law enforcement. Yet many questions remain unanswered - What elements of community policing have been implemented? To what extent have they been implemented? Does implementation vary by region or size of agency?

This article offers a picture of how the implementation of community policing is shaping up at the turn of the century from the perspective of chief executives. We base our information on an extensive national survey of community policing practices in 1,888 municipal police departments. The survey targeted 2,500 municipal police agencies. Included in the sample were all agencies that employed 500 or more sworn officers. The remaining agencies were selected using sampling probabilities proportional to their number of full-time sworn officers. Each chief executive in the sample received a letter in 1999 requesting participation from the Deputy Director of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). Survey questionnaires were mailed to each sample department by Indiana University’s Center for Survey Research, and repeated fax and telephone follow-ups were made to obtain responses. A response rate of 75 percent was achieved.

Community Policing Defined

Community policing takes many forms. For some, community policing means instituting foot patrols and bicycle patrols, getting out of patrol cars, and a host of other activities that are designed to bring police officers closer to the communities they serve. For others, it means order maintenance, cleaning up tattered neighborhoods, and fixing “broken windows”. We define community policing as a philosophy of policing that emphasizes proactive, preventive measures to combat crime and disorder. To implement community policing, law enforcement agencies must change its operational and administrative arrangements. We highlight three integral dimensions:

- Community Interaction and Engagement
- Problem Solving; and
- Organizational Adaptation

Community Interaction and Engagement means developing a relationship between the police and the community. It ranges from encouraging officers to interact with citizens more frequently, to engaging the community as “co-producers” of public safety. Problem Solving means focusing police resources on solving, rather than simply responding to, recurring problems that plague community residents. Organizational Adaptation means adjusting various elements of the organization -- including management, structure, policies, and training -- in ways that enable Community Interaction and Engagement and Problem Solving strategies to thrive.
To what extent have police chiefs and departments across the country implemented these elements? The remaining sections of this article examine whether and how agencies have implemented community policing.

**Findings**

We begin by examining the number of municipal police agencies that responded to the survey by region and agency size. Agency size is based on the number of full-time sworn employees. We use the definition of “Region” as indicated by the FBI in its Uniform Crime Reports. Chart 1 shows that the largest number of respondents came from the South, followed by the Midwest, Northeast and West, respectively.

**Agency Size and Community Policing**

Does community policing vary by the size of the agency? Is there a difference in implementing community policing between larger agencies (those with more than 500 sworn) and smaller ones? Chief executives were asked to rate a series of items about community policing as they understood it. We use responses to three of these items to assess the extent to which each chief executive believes that his or her department has implemented community policing. The items are:

- Implementing community policing is my agency’s top priority
- My agency has fully implemented community policing
- Most officers in my agency are well-trained to do community policing

Overall, our survey results indicate that 77.1 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “implementing community policing is my agency’s top priority.” Only 4 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Fifty-six percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “my agency has fully implemented community policing.” Slightly over 18 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. When it comes to training, 47.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed that “most officers in my agency are well-trained to do community policing.” Many chiefs were neutral on this topic (34.3 percent) and 18.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. We also found that chiefs in larger agencies agree with all three questions (individually) more than smaller agencies. Correlations

![Chart 1: Number of Respondents by Region and Agency Size](chart.png)
between the answers to these three questions and agency size categories are all positive and significant. If we treat the three items as a single scale, the correlation between agency size and the scale is also positive and significant. Table 2 shows the results. As the table indicates, in each case, larger agencies have higher mean scores on their level of agreement with each community policing question. These findings are similar to those of earlier studies, indicating that larger agencies claim to be more involved in community policing than smaller agencies.

Region and Community Policing

Does the implementation of community policing vary by region of the country? In a previous study based on data from a 1994 survey, we found that those agencies in the West were more likely to engage in community policing than those in other regions. From the current survey (conducted five years later), we find that there are no significant regional differences for the first question, but there are differences for the next two questions, though the differences are not very large. Chiefs in the West (mean score = 3.56) and South (3.54) believe that they have fully implement community policing at a higher rate than the Northeast (3.48) and Midwest (3.31). Similarly, law enforcement executives in the West and South perceive that most officers in their departments are well trained to do community policing at a higher rate than their counterparts in the Northeast and Midwest. Chart 3 shows the differences by region.

Is Community Policing New?

Police executives have often debated whether community policing is “old wine in new bottles” or a paradigm shift in police philosophy. From our experience, chiefs and officers from large agencies tend to view community policing as a more recent phenomenon, while chiefs and officers from smaller agencies tend to believe that “community policing is something that has always been done - we know our community, neighbors, and friends because our area is relatively small.”

In the survey, we asked respondents to rate the following statement: “Community policing is mostly doing the same things police have always done, but calling it something different.” (Responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)). Results indicate that the debate continues over the ‘newness’ of community policing – chiefs in the largest agencies are less likely to agree (mean score of 2.07) with this statement than...
chiefs from the smallest agencies (mean score of 3.09). Similarly, there appears to be some minor regional effects as well. Chiefs in the Northeast (mean score of 2.76) and Midwest (2.74) are more likely to agree with the statement than those from the West (2.52) and South (2.65).

### Specific Elements of Community Policing

#### Community Interaction and Engagement

Community Interaction and Engagement calls for police to become immersed in the culture, structure, and activities of the community. This operational strategy means that the police and community engage in a continuous information input and feedback process. The role of the police is to help the community establish and maintain social order by assisting in easing

### Table 1. Is community policing new?

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<th>0-25</th>
<th>26-100</th>
<th>101-500</th>
<th>501+</th>
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<td>Community policing is mostly doing the same things police have always done, but calling it something different</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.07</td>
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*Each cell contains the mean score. Scores range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
Social problems that may lead to crime. Survey results show that the majority of departments report implementing traditional community-relations type programs -- neighborhood watch (89 percent), youth recreation or mentoring (74 percent) and providing victim assistance services (71 percent). A majority of agencies now provide training in police procedures or problem solving to citizens (60 percent).

Agencies are now working more closely with district or beat-level citizen panels that provide policy advice and feedback. Nearly one-third of the chiefs responded that they engage in this activity. Over one-third of municipal police departments also participate in a government program that coordinates multi-governmental services within neighborhoods. Chiefs communicate with community groups through newsletters (35 percent) and patrol officers have individual voice mail (41 percent) and pagers (26 percent) so citizens can contact them directly.

**Problem Solving**

Indicators of problem solving can be addressed at two levels - first, through the ability of officers to conduct problem solving through management policies and second, through factors linked to Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment.

At the management level, police chiefs across the country indicate that patrol officers have the authority to initiate problem-solving projects without approval of their supervisors (1209 of 1844 respondents or 66 percent). Furthermore, in 723 jurisdictions (of 1847 or 39 percent), some patrol officers don’t have to answer calls for service so they can work on solving problems on their beat. Patrol officers may also change their hours with the permission of their supervisor to work on problem solving projects. This occurs in 1125 agencies (of 1857 or nearly 61 percent).

To assist officers in their problem solving projects, a number of departments have analytic capabilities that could assist officers during the Scanning, Analysis or Assessment phases of the SARA model. For example, over 83 percent of the agencies (1232 of 1847) reported that they conduct hot spot analysis. In fact, nearly a third of these agencies said they had done this task for over five years. In particular, conducting routine hot spot analysis has been going on for over five years in 382 agencies or 31 percent of the agencies that said they were capable of doing this task. Many of the agencies were in large cities (167 or 43.8 percent), but smaller departments also have these tools.

Another method for assisting in identifying and analyzing problems is through computer mapping. This tool is available in 845 or 1848 agencies (46 percent). Access to data to analyze community or neighborhood conditions is available in 755 departments or nearly 41 percent of the agencies that responded. Overall, it appears that agencies have the capabilities of conducting extensive and detailed problem solving projects, but it is unclear whether and how the tools...
Organizational Adaptation: Top Ten List of Community Policing Policies

Organizational Adaptation means that agencies must encourage officers to practice community policing and that the organizational atmosphere is one that allows community policing to thrive. Are officers engaged in community policing? Are they complying with requests to do so? Is the organization set up for community policing in terms of policies, management, training, and community involvement?

To determine whether organizations have made changes or adaptations, Roger Parks established a “Top Ten List” of community policing policies. To do this, he computed partial correlations between the chief executives’ perceptions of the extent to which their department had implemented community policing and each of 44 community policing activities, controlling for the number of sworn officers in each department.

The “Top Ten List” of policies most strongly correlated with chief executives perceptions of their agencies community policing implementation are:

1. Officers are given written job descriptions of community policing and problem-solving responsibilities
2. Routine reports are required of officers’ problem-solving or community policing activities
3. Patrol officer written evaluations include ratings of community policing and problem-oriented policing skills or activities
4. Department participates in youth recreation or mentoring programs
5. Department works with district or beat-level citizen panels that give policy advice & feedback
6. Department routinely uses other city or county data to analyze community or neighborhood conditions (e.g., schools, health, code, probation/parole, tax, licensing)
7. Department conducts routine hot spot analysis of public safety problems
8. Department provides training in police procedures or problem-solving to citizens
9. Participation in a government program that coordinates many government services at the neighborhood level
10. Department routinely provides reports that analyze calls, crimes, or police activity to officers about their beats

Six items in this list are policies to make police officers accountable for their exercise of community policing (#1, #2, & #3) and to facilitate their exercise of accountability (#6, #7, & #10). Officers in police agencies where the chief executive believes community policing to be most fully implemented are much more likely to be given written descriptions of their community policing and problem solving responsibilities than are officers in agencies where community policing is less fully implemented. They are also much more likely to be required to report in writing on their problem solving and community policing activities, and to receive written evaluations of their community policing and problem solving activities. To facilitate these activities, officers are more likely to receive beat level analyses of calls for service, crime, and police activity, and agencies are more likely to conduct hot spot analyses and use non-police data to augment their analyses of community conditions.

These correlates and their rank at the top of the list of policies imply that in chief executives’ minds, successful implementation of community policing first and foremost requires formalizing an incentive/reward system that targets community policing and problem solving activities by officers.

It is insufficient to simply tell officers to engage in community policing. Having a written mission statement for the department ranks 22nd among

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1 We control for number of sworn officers because it is correlated with the chiefs perceptions of implementing community policing and with engaging in many of the activities listed.
the 44 policies in its correlation with community policing implementation. Traditional incentive/reward systems are also insufficient. Routine reports and written evaluations rank 37th and 39th among the policies.

Instead our results suggest that community policing implementation requires telling officers explicitly and formally what their community policing and problem solving duties entail and providing them with information necessary to engage these duties, then requiring that they report their execution of community policing and problem solving duties and receive evaluative feedback on their execution. Managing for successful community policing implementation therefore is not different in these respects than managing for implementation of new programs of any type. It entails telling workers what is expected of them, supplying the information tools needed to meet these expectations, then monitoring and rewarding based upon execution of expectations.

The remaining policies in our top ten list represent community involvement and participation in activities not always thought to be police duties. Departments rated high in community policing implementation are substantially more likely to have district or beat level citizen panels that give policy advice and also to train citizens in police procedures and problem solving. They are also more likely to participate in youth recreation or mentoring programs, and programs that coordinate many government services at the neighborhood level.

**Highlights of Findings**

- 1,888 municipal police departments participated in this survey, representing a 75% response rate.
- 77.1 percent of respondents said that “implementing community policing is my agency’s top priority.”
- 56 percent of respondents said that “my agency has fully implemented community policing.”
- Chiefs in the West and South believe that they have fully implemented community policing at a higher rate than the chiefs in the Northeast and Midwest.
- A majority of agencies (60%) provide training in police procedures or problem solving to citizens.
- A majority of departments report implementing traditional community-relations type programs -- neighborhood watch (89 percent), youth recreation or mentoring (74 percent) and providing victim assistance services (71 percent).
- Sixty-six percent of police chiefs across the country indicate that patrol officers have the authority to initiate problem-solving projects without approval of their supervisors.
- Over 83 percent of the agencies reported that they conduct hot spot analysis.
- Officers in police agencies where the chief executive believes community policing to be most fully implemented are much more likely to be given written descriptions of their community policing and problem solving responsibilities.
- Successful implementation of community policing first and foremost requires formalizing an incentive/reward system that targets community policing and problem solving activities by officers.
- Departments rated high in community policing implementation are substantially more likely to have district or beat level citizen panels that give policy advice and also to train citizens in police procedures and problem solving.
Endnotes


3 Ibid.


5 The following sources were also referenced in preparing this article:


About Justice & Security Strategies, Inc.

Justice & Security Strategies, Inc. (formerly 21st Century Solutions, Inc.) is a consulting firm specializing in law enforcement, homeland security, and public policy strategies.

We conduct research and evaluation, provide training and technical assistance, and provide management consulting services to criminal justice professionals. For the past five years we have worked with over 25 law enforcement agencies and prosecutor’s offices across the country evaluating community policing, school-based problems, anti-drug issues, gun violence and domestic violence. In addition, we have expertise in strategic planning and accountability systems.

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The Center for Justice Leadership and Management conducts research in the justice field that is useful to policy makers and practitioners. It provides professional training and technical assistance to justice organizations, their leaders, and managers in throughout the Commonwealth, the United States, and internationally. The Center disseminates state-of-the-art knowledge and research findings to the public, professionals, and policy makers through conferences, web sites, newsletters, seminars and policy forums, and other appropriate venues. For more information on the Center, please visit www.gmu.edu/depts/pia/adj/.

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