

**WHAT WILL BE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COSTA MESA
POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE MEDIA IN MEETING THE
INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY BY THE YEAR 2002?**

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

**The relationship between the Costa Mesa Police Department
and the media in meeting the information needs
of the Community by the year 2002**

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Historically, media relations at the Costa Mesa Police Department probably reflected that of many law enforcement agencies. Press releases were made by the Watch Commander or a detective supervisor in response to direct inquiries from the media about specific incidents. Generally, the media was considered a burden and viewed with suspicion. Recently, the leadership of the CMPD made the assertion that information regarding the police department and related public safety issues is of great value to the community. With timely, accurate and complete information the community would be enabled to make informed and responsible decisions concerning public policy as it pertains to local law enforcement. This article will analyze and identify strategies to take media relations to a higher level to ensure that the community's information needs are served in the future.

The development of probable futures was the first step. To determine probable futures, several research methodologies were employed to gather, analyze, evaluate, and develop data regarding this issue. These methodologies included literature scanning, brainstorming sessions, and a nominal group technique (NGT) consisting of representatives from law enforcement, TV and print media, and the legal field.

The NGT panel identified the following top 5 emerging trends as potentially impacting media relations with the CMPD through the next 5 years:

1. The media will have an increasing level of technology available to cover news events faster and to greater audiences.
2. The demand for disclosure of information related to law enforcement and public safety will continue to increase.
3. The community will demand a greater voice in all aspects of local government including law enforcement.
4. The image of law enforcement will steadily increase in a positive direction.
5. The public in general will have a fear based on the perception that crime is worsening.

The NGT panel also identified the following top 5 events which could conceivably occur over the next five years impacting the CMPD's relationship with the media:

1. Occurrence of a critical incident (such as an officer involved shooting) was perceived as questionable in terms of the officer's actions, performance or conduct.
2. Change in the CMPD media relations policy for a tighter disclosure of information.
3. Legislation or case decisions mandating tighter restriction on disclosure of information.
4. CMPD implements electronic record management system significantly expediting the flow of disclosable information.
5. CMPD implements encryption technology reducing the media's ability to live broadcast in-progress incidents.

Following the determination of probable futures, strategic planning was conducted consisting of a WOTS-UP analysis, stakeholder identification, and strategy development. In the WOTS UP analysis weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and strengths regarding

media relations and the CMPD were examined. The following stakeholders were identified: the Chief, local media, field supervisors, Watch Commanders, Press Information Officer (PIO), line officers, civil libertarians, records management personnel, City Manager, City Council, City Attorney, Police Officers Association, and the community. The following strategies were developed for implementation:

1. Implement paperless technology as part of planned computer upgrade
2. Develop and present training regarding new technology and media relations
3. Develop policy with input from all stakeholders
4. Create CMPD home page on City Internet web site for proactive unedited disclosures, opinion pieces, crime prevention and safety tips, requests for public assistance, crime warnings, and crime statistics
5. Develop format with local access TV to provide same information as in strategy 4.

A transition management plan was designed to facilitate the implementation of the strategic plan. A crucial component of the transition management plan was to identify and analyze the critical mass involved with the issue. Critical mass is a term used to indicate those stakeholders whose active support is necessary to ensure successful implementation of the strategic plan. Regarding the strategic implementation of technology, the following stakeholders were identified as the critical mass and were analyzed as to their commitment and responsibility in fulfilling the strategic plan: the Chief, management information systems personnel, the media, and the PIO.

Leadership as always is crucial to the success of managing change to a desired future. The first and foremost implication for leadership is to embrace the concept of being futuristic in thinking. To be futuristic, leadership must start in the present by being willing to realistically and honestly assess the current status. Then leadership must envision a desirable and attainable future and clearly communicate that striving for this future is

founded in the values of the organization and is in the spirit of the department's mission statement. Leadership should perceive its role as a facilitator, fostering a sense of teamwork and inclusiveness from the beginning conceptualization stages through the planning and implementation stages.

Concluding this futures study are two recommendations for the leadership of the CMPD:

In light of the trends and events forecasting and scenario developing of this futures study, the CMPD needs to acknowledge that simply maintaining the status quo for media relations will not adequately meet the demands of the future. This first recommendation, then, is for the CMPD to formally recognize that the accurate, complete, and timely sharing of information with the community through the media is an imperative.

Based on the WOTS UP analysis, the stakeholders analysis, and the budgetary considerations, the CMPD leadership should recognize its unique ability at this point in the department's history to capitalize on the present opportunities to effect a significant change in media relations. The second recommendation therefore is that the CMPD actively move forward as prescribed under the strategic plan and transition management plan to meet the future information needs of the community.