

# **Community Cultural Academies:**

*A Program to Engage Ethnically Diverse and Limited*

*English Proficient Communities.*



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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).

## **Community Cultural Academies- A Program to Engage Ethnically Diverse and Limited English Proficient Communities.**

In early November of 2006, the Sacramento Police Department received an awakening to the challenges law enforcement will soon be facing.

On that wind driven, rainy, November morning, a slightly built elderly Filipino lady walked up to the public counter at police headquarters. The woman was obviously upset, talking loudly and was physically shaking. Police staff attempted to calm her while making repeated inquiries to clarify the nature of her visit. Communication was difficult; the woman did not speak English. The staff was able to calm her, and contacted an interpretation service to help facilitate communication with the woman. After 45 minutes of trying, the language line advised they were unable to accurately understand her issue, as she spoke a dialect of Tagalog unfamiliar with the interpreter. The language line thought the woman had an issue with her purse, but could not pinpoint it further.

Hours passed; the counter staff had exhausted all the resources it could think of, and the woman now sat patiently in the lobby. Finally, with the help of a local church member, staff learned the woman had entered the police facility to report that, while she was using the ATM outside the facility, the taxi in which she had arrived in drove off. She had left her purse in the taxi and wanted police help to retrieve it. Within 10 minutes of discovering this information, the counter staff was able to contact the cab company, and make arrangements to have the driver return. Unfortunately, the time consumed for this ten-minute task took just over eight hours!

Just as the Department had solved the elderly woman's issue, across town, other officers were at a local high school responding to allegations that a female Hmong student was sexually assaulted. The student initially informed the authorities that an unknown student had forced her into a bathroom and assaulted her at knifepoint, during which the assailant had inflicted several minor stab wounds to her chest. When the student contacted her father, however, her story changed significantly. She now insisted she was not sexually assaulted; rather, she reported being beaten by a group of girls. Once the officers on scene were able to sort through the details, they determined, in fact, she had been raped. It was her father who had encouraged her to recant the story to preserve her standing in the Hmong community.

### **The impact of our changing culture**

These examples may seem like isolated incidents, but in reality, both scenarios represent issues that will soon challenge every law enforcement agency in California. Each day California continues to become more racially and ethnically diverse. The changes in California's diversity will present many challenges and questions for local law enforcement agencies. Is your agency equipped with policing and problem solving strategies to address the challenges associated with policing ethnic and racially diverse communities? How does a

local law enforcement agency provide service to communities that speak a language other than English? What effect does your department's enforcement efforts and priorities have on communities with cultures and core values that are unfamiliar to the majority of your officers? The fact of the matter is the face of California is changing. Local agencies must be responsive to the changes if they wish to remain effective law enforcement service providers.

In the summer of 2006, the Sacramento Police Department pioneered a response plan called "Community Cultural Academies." The need for the cultural academies was made evident as the City became more racially and language diverse. For other cities, large and small, the story will be (or already is) much the same. The Community Cultural Academy is one-way Sacramento found to bridge the emerging gap in community expectations. Depending on your community, it may be an option worth considering.

## **California – The Melting Pot**

Within the next ten years, California's population is estimated to grow by six million. The majority of those six million new residents will belong to a race other than Caucasian. About 40 percent of all of Californians now speak a language other than English, and there are more than 250 different languages spoken though out the State. Nearly one-fifth of America's school-age children speak a language other than English at home.<sup>i</sup>

By 2015, the California's Caucasian population is expected to shrink by 13%. At the same time, the Hispanic population is projected to rise by 8%, and the Asian population is expected to increase by 2 %.<sup>ii</sup> Caucasians will soon cease to be a majority, becoming the largest minority group amongst many. In 2005, almost one-third of all the new immigrants entering the United States establish residency in California. Nine million of California's 37 million residents were born outside of the United States.

As these numbers illustrate, California has become the destination of preference for immigrants. Two of the State's fastest growing populations are the Hispanic and Asian populations<sup>1</sup> although persons from around the world also move here for the promise of the Golden State. California is attractive to these populations because of the availability jobs, social programs and the knowledge that it is already a host to large similar ethnic communities throughout the length of the State. Clearly, the old ways will not be enough. To police our cities in a manner they need and desire, we must alter some of the tenets of Community Policing and other philosophies to match our emerging reality.

## **Need for Updated Diversity Programs**

Modern law enforcement has traditionally relied on Community Oriented Policing (COP) as the main strategy to engage partnerships in any particular community. The capacity of COP continues to be tested for its ability to address

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<sup>1</sup> Includes Pacific Islanders

crime and quality of life issues within ethnic and language diverse populations. COP programs and principals have had limited success when applied in these areas by officers who may not understand the community's language, culture, values and beliefs. Imagine applying James Q Wilson's broken window theory<sup>iii</sup> in a community that does not have running water, sewer systems, communication systems or even a window to be broken. Many of California's immigrants arrive from such locales, and may not readily see how the police can impact the health of their neighborhoods beyond mere crime control. The task of partnering with these ethnically diverse, limited English proficient (LEP) and English as second language (ESL) communities to deliver policing services is often underestimated by mainstream one-size-fits-all policing strategies and responses.

Communication is often a challenge, if not impossible, as many ethnically diverse are linguistically isolated, speaking limited or no English. In LEP or ESL communities, the lack of language skills impacts the community members in many ways. They are hampered in their ability to access fundamental necessities such as employment, police protection and healthcare. Complicating the language barriers, their home culture may also dramatically impact their willingness to seek government assistance, or even understand the role and nature of those charged with their safety. Programs to mitigate those issues are desperately needed in many areas. The Community Cultural Academy is one choice.

## **Community Cultural Academies**

Cultural Community Academies are designed to bridge the "culture gap." They are designed to support, educate and provide linguistically isolated, disenfranchised LEP/ESL cultures with pertinent information about public safety and the criminal justice system. The objective of the Academy is to educate communities about how these systems so residents may better use and benefit from their presence. The academy also provides the opportunity to create a tangible network to provide law enforcement with access into these communities.

A primary goal of the Academy program is to honor and respect the cultural diversity of the selected community, and to bring forward the challenges faced by the police in their work to protect the multi-cultural population. The program also seeks to defuse the confusion and frustration commonly associated with assimilation into a foreign environment or culture. The Academy provides a hands-on, bi-lingual, participatory forum to help foster a spirit of trust and partnership towards law enforcement that will help assimilate the diverse communities to the common living standards shared within the communities region. It is a multi-faceted, results oriented, program that provides insight, assistance, understanding and education within the targeted community that will assist them to survive and prosper. Community Cultural Academies differ in one significant way from the traditional citizen academies. They specifically include extensive cultural exchanges to help the both the police and attendee better understand each other's culture and/or position.

## **Outreach and Development**

During the initial outreach conducted prior to the creation of the Academy curriculum, the concept of transparency became the focal point of discussion. Community members and the Department had lengthy discussions on the process needed to help community with possible negative perceptions of law enforcement. How could recent immigrants overcome their long-standing distrust of the police? Both parties agreed the ability to truly communicate would have to be a cornerstone for the Academy to succeed. A research study conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice showed that an immigrant's attitude towards law enforcement is less positive than those of native-born citizens, and immigrants are less likely to initiate contact with police or report crimes<sup>iv</sup>. The study cited references that immigrants who migrated from counties that experience corrupt and abusive policing carry over those negative associations over to the American policing. Community leaders provided insight that in their opinion, communication, information sharing, and access are the keys elements needed to overcome the immigrant's negative associations of American policing<sup>v</sup>. As a result of these discussions, a new term was born, *transparency policing*.

Community leaders stated early in the discussion and creation stages of the cultural academy concept, that law enforcement agencies must express the goal of being transparent to targeted community members. The early identification of the transparency goal ensured community participants were able to have confidence in the impact of the programs aimed at their community. They also helped define how transparent the department must become to overcome culture and language issues then preventing effective police/community partnerships.

## **Developing the Academy Curriculum**

The Academy curriculum was developed through focus groups so each ethnic group in the community received the information and experiences that fit the particular needs of that community. Community Cultural Academies are not a one size fits all program. Like all diversity-based programs, respect of cultural differences, understanding, assistance and education are key elements in the success of the Community Cultural Academy Program. To facilitate communication and prevent misunderstandings all the information provided at these academies, translation through wireless headphones (similar to equipment used at the United Nations) was available for any participant. The program is designed to engage the diverse population with matters concerning public safety and the local law enforcement agency. For example, in the Hmong community, curriculum was developed in conjunction with a focus group consisting of a cross

section of the Hmong population to address issues facing the population, such as distrust of the police, marriage and raising chickens.

In the Hmong culture, girls traditionally marry very young, (under age of 18) to men who are often over 18. While widely accepted in the Hmong community, this is in conflict with American values and, in some cases, California law. Newly arriving Hmong also often saw nothing wrong with raising chickens in an apartment, and thought nothing about sanitary concerns or regulations regarding animal welfare. The Department learned many Hmong adults entering California have never used a calendar, kept a watch or clock, and don't understand the concept of making and keeping appointments. Many have never used a pen or pencil. Creating understanding of these norms during exchanges with community leaders was invaluable to create open meaningful dialog. It also reflects the dire need to bridge the cultural gap beyond merely communicating in a common language.

## **Goals and Objectives of the Academy**

The Community Cultural Academy is similar in some ways to the citizen's academies found in many cities. Having created a planning partnership with these groups, however, gave the Department an opportunity to add specific objectives of benefit to all concerned. Each Cultural Academy integrates:

***Problem Solving*** – a section within the program is dedicated to identify and resolve any current problems affecting the group concerning law enforcement and the criminal justice system. This may include myths and realities of American Policing, experiences from their past that might have shaped those beliefs, and any other cultural issues identified are also addressed.

***Community Recruitment*** – modeled from the Sacramento Police Department's Community Recruiter Program, each participant of the academy is introduced to the concept of community recruiting. Community recruiting is a program that targets the leaders of a community to help their community members for positions in law enforcement. The importance and responsibility for recruiting members of the participant's culture are stressed. Academy participants are encouraged to become official Community Recruiters so they can assist with recruitment and employment efforts in addition to becoming more familiar and comfortable with law enforcement.

***Communication*** - The Community Cultural Academy stresses the importance of a quarterly newsletter to provide information to the participants about law enforcement issues, trends or concerns that involve the particular ethnic group. The newsletter is written in the participant's native language, and made available in their community; not just at the police station. The newsletter information includes crime prevention tips, job opportunities and invitations to local law enforcement-sponsored events.

***Volunteerism*** - participants are encouraged to become official volunteers of the sponsoring agency so they can become more familiar and comfortable with assisting during times when the police can provide culturally sensitive services to the community. These instances could be for crime series, to deal with specific

issues in affected neighborhoods, or just to provide information to strengthen the bonds between residents and city government.

**Crime Prevention** – participants will be instructed on personal/home safety as well as the latest information concerning Homeland Security. Concerns about terrorism are sometimes felt more keenly in immigrant communities, who might feel others could suspect them because of their linguistic isolation or recent arrival in the area. Having open lines between the police and these residents is an important step to prevent problems or mitigate their effect if anything occurs.

## Results

The Sacramento Police Department hosted three Community Cultural Academies in 2006. The Cultural academies were hosted in partnership with the Regional Community Policing Institute Sacramento. The three academies targeted the Hmong, Mien, and Slavic communities. The average attendance for each academy was 45 participants. While the academies served the goal very well, several lessons were learned and are important to any agency looking to create a similar program.

**Acceptance**- All three of the targeted communities were extremely accepting and appreciative of the program. Do not underestimate the emotional need for ethnically diverse communities to be accepted by mainstream America society. While still seeking to retain their cultural identity every group of academy attendees were eager to learn about and embrace American culture, including the American way of policing.

**Access to Law Enforcement** - Transparent policing requires as much unrestricted access to the law enforcement agency as possible. The targeted communities felt strongly that only confidential criminal investigation information should be off limits. The communities felt that true transparency demands that any member of the community be allowed to question, research, and comment on any function of the police agency.

**Technology**- The community members strongly thought the Police Department was missing out on an important tool to help develop transparency. Advances in technology have created avenues for greater access to information on law enforcement and its mission, values and enforcement principals. Overwhelmingly, academy participants thought that offering a police web page that converts to multi-languages would be the first step to create true transparency, as it would allow accessibility to LEP/ESL communities. The creation of a multi-language web page would allow community members to read or hear everything from the law enforcements' agencies core values and mission, to the latest policing issues facing the community.

Community members also felt the web page should include a web log (BLOG) and the ability to host Pod Casts. BLOG's are logs placed on a website to provide information and the opportunity for a reader to comment. BLOG's are used to encourage informal discussion, and to document issues and events occurring within law enforcement and/or community groups. Items such as the police department daily activity reports could be posted on a BLOG or the Web

page. Pod Casts are media files that are distributed over the Internet and can be played back on mobile devices or personal computers. BLOGS and Pod Casts are designed to provide information to an immediate feedback generation. BLOGS and Pod Casts can address any issue or concern with the community, and can be delivered in any language.

**Community Crime Meetings-** Historically, most law enforcement agencies have been open to idea of meeting with the community to distribute crime information. Many agencies go further by using the Internet to display information on crime patterns and trends. To be transparent requires a deeper relationship than simply designing a web site to provide statistical information, or distributing general crime information at community meetings. Meeting participants felt that to be as transparent as possible, the Department should create a true “community crime meeting.” A community crime meeting is trimmed-down civilian version of “COMPSTAT”<sup>vi</sup> developed by the New York Police Department. During these meetings, the policing would provide the maximum amount of information regarding crime, crime series, trends or events. It would also include what resources and manpower will be used to address the identified issues. This information exchange would be designed to allow the community to ask hard questions about what the agency is doing to prevent crime, its priorities, and how it is improving quality of life issues.

The community crime meeting grants the community a place to see first hand the inter workings of law enforcement and helps to remove the mystic or myths of law enforcement and move towards true transparency policing, which in turn will minimize any concerns from the community about the role of law enforcement. The information shared in this meeting should be documented for inclusion in the department’s web page and be available in a variety of languages.

The concept of the community crime meeting will be introduced during the next round of community academies scheduled for 2007. Interest in this meeting from every community is strong. The implementation of this program is hoped to be the missing key to the goal of delivering transparency policing.

## **Conclusion**

For the foreseeable future, California’s population will continue to become more diverse in race, ethnicity, culture and language. Law enforcement agencies Statewide must be prepared to respond to these changes in demographics to provide effective policing and customer service. Failing to acknowledge and prepare for the demographic changes already in motion will result in law enforcement that is unable to function in communities that do not understand, value, or respect American policing or its culture. Creating and implementing a Community Cultural Academy would afford your department a forum to develop mutual respect and trust before a catastrophic event causes irreparable harm to your agency’s ability to deliver policing services effectively within that community. Heed the warning to prevent your department from being

bulldozed by the diversity “freight train” arriving in your community. The Cultural Academy may be one way to derail possible problems before they occur.

*For more information on the creation and implementation of a Community Cultural Academy, contact Captain Dan Schiele with the Sacramento Police Departments Personnel Services Division by email at:*

*dschiele at pd.cityofsacramento.org*

## END NOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Census Report, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/profiledynamic.html>, 2000

<sup>ii</sup> School of Policy, Planning, and Development, Demographics of California, [http://www.usc.edu/schools/sppd/futures/demographic\\_futures/USC\\_Demog\\_Futures.pdf](http://www.usc.edu/schools/sppd/futures/demographic_futures/USC_Demog_Futures.pdf), Jan 2001

<sup>iii</sup> Wilson, James Q, Broken Windows, Manhattan Institute, [http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/\\_atlantic\\_monthly-broken\\_windows.pdf](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/_atlantic_monthly-broken_windows.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Vera Institute of Justice, Building strong Police-Immigrate Community Relations, COPS Office, Jan 2005

<sup>v</sup> Saephanh. Frank, Personal Interview, Nov 2006

<sup>vi</sup> COMPSTAT Process, New York Police Department, [http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/chfdept/compstat\\_process.html](http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/chfdept/compstat_process.html)