

**HOW SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED POLICE AGENCIES CAN  
IMPROVE SERVICES DURING RECESSION**

**by**

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

## **HOW SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED POLICE AGENCIES CAN IMPROVE SERVICES DURING RECESSION**

Until recently, California police agencies couldn't find enough qualified applicants to fill their ranks; now officers are being laid off. Public safety agencies are not invulnerable to budget cuts and workforce reductions. A 2009 national survey of 233 police organizations found that 63% of respondents reported making plans to cut their budgets.[1] While the Great Recession of 2009 has placed severe strains on local law enforcement agency budgets, the public's expectations have not diminished. "There is a collision between high and rising demands for government services," the *Washington Post's* Robert Samuelson warns, "and the capacity of the economy to produce the income and tax revenues to pay for those demands." [2] Indeed, it has been recognized for some time that decreasing police budgets would require the development of more effective policing methods.[3]

The most recent recruitment brochure for a Chief of Police for Carlsbad, California speaks to this issue, citing the need to "balance the operational needs with the budget/resource constraints and determine how best to maintain the service levels given the state of the budget locally as well as statewide." How will the new chief do that? Is it possible the chief may even be able to improve services during these tough times? Many private-sector companies found ways to do more with fewer workers by becoming leaner and more efficient in the last year, but government has been slower to respond. Nonetheless, there are a series of steps that should be taken to get the most out of whatever resources the chief has to work with:

- Obtain a community mandate to identify what matters most

- Use officer discretionary time to advance agency goals
- Innovate through collaboration

On the pages that follow, these three action items will be further explored so the Chief Executive can consider how they might be applied within their organizations and why it would be a mistake, despite budgetary pressures, to abandon Community Oriented Policing concepts—that quite the opposite is necessary.

### **OBTAIN A COMMUNITY MANDATE**

Community consultation refers to an organized process to involve citizens in the planning process to promote equity, access, and participation, and may result in the establishment of a consensus-based mandate. While local government routinely incorporates community consultation into the development of City and County General Plans, law enforcement often does not facilitate that level of citizen participation. Whether that is the result of tradition, independence, or just the idea the police get to decide what is important is irrelevant—people now expect to have a role in how important decisions are made. The United Way’s Community Assessment Project (CAP) offers an alternative model. CAP is a consortium of public and private health, education, human service and civic organizations. CAP was convened in 1995 to measure and improve the quality of life in Santa Cruz County by raising public awareness, providing accurate information, setting community goals, and supporting collaborative action plans to achieve those goals.

A community mandate informs the police about the issues the public considers most important to their quality of life and authorizes police action. In a transparent and

inclusive process the question, “What will it take for us, in this community, to achieve our public safety goals?”[4] reframes the issue of how police resources should be managed and supports the development of a Community Crime Prevention Plan.

Obtaining a community mandate takes a great deal of work but offers many benefits: it supports a productive relationship between citizens and the police, provides opportunities to establish new relationships in the community, increases citizen satisfaction and police legitimacy, promotes public awareness of safety issues, and allows the police to concentrate its limited resources on those issues citizens care about most. Police will always respond to and investigate serious crimes, but knowing what matters to the people most provides departments the opportunity to prioritize its activities.

Between 1995 and 2009 the Santa Cruz CAP has successfully channeled community concerns to achieve desired outcomes. When CAP identified alarming rates of youth alcohol and drug abuse in 1995, a coalition of more than 110 agencies and individuals addressed the problem to reverse the trend lines and the problem of abuse declined at a greater rate than the state’s average. Other notable achievements of CAP are:

- A committee was formed to commission a homeless census and needs assessment which led to the award of a four million dollar federal grant to prevent homelessness and promote rapid re-housing in 2000.
- A county-wide effort consisting of twenty organizations created an initiative in 2004 to improve health care for children resulted in the Healthy Kids Plan that is now providing medical and dental and other services to minors regardless of income levels.

Community cooperation on important issues can tap enormous reserves of energy that can be focused to improve conditions. Survey after survey shows that people are concerned about crime; yet, consider the 2009 CAP community goal for public safety: “By the year 2010, crime within Santa Cruz County will continue to decrease and residents will have increased confidence in their personal safety at home and in the community.”[5] This goal is undefined and there is no action plan to achieve the objective. There is no reason law enforcement agencies cannot play a more substantive role harnessing community concerns in a way that transforms vague notions of supporting the local police to an involved citizenry that actively participates in identifying problems, suggesting solutions, and insisting that police have the resources to accomplish community goals.

While CAP provides a good framework for basing community goals on reliable information, something else is necessary to turn the process into an action plan. Based on national strategies, jurisdictions in Canada and Australia produce comprehensive community crime prevention plans. The Canadian model emphasizes inclusion of underrepresented groups and community mobilization; the Australian model relies on community focus groups and an evidence-based approach.[6] Both systems are presented in terms of political and social processes instead of one that is the exclusive domain of law enforcement. This is not to suggest it is necessary or even desirable to replicate these systems: law enforcement in the United States continues to be a local responsibility. These models do, however, contain principals that may be adapted for use by local police agencies.

## **USE DISCRETIONARY TIME TO ADVANCE PUBLIC SAFETY GOALS**

A study of the San Jose Police Department in 2000 by the City's Auditor determined 38% of its patrol officer's time was uncommitted.[7] This figure is not unusual; a 2009 survey by this author of thirteen California police agencies of various sizes indicated, on average, officers had 37.8% of discretionary time. Officer time is the agency's most valuable and expensive resource; the issue of how best to use that time is critical to accomplishing the agency's mission. There is, however, no definitive standard to determine appropriate discretionary time levels or even staffing levels: these ratios vary from department to department based on a variety of factors, not least of which are community expectations.

A workload study determines how much work the agency generates, and its capacity to produce work. The study should encompass patrol, investigations, traffic, administration, and other major divisions to provide a complete picture of the agency's capacity, avoid unintentional redundant functions, and eliminate conflicts amongst divisions.

The results will enable the department to consider a variety of options, including staffing deployment, investigative prioritization, workload balancing, reorganization, or whatever else will support the achievement of the agency's primary goals, a portion of which may be established through community consultation. In other words, a process that encourages a representative sample of citizens to help identify what matters most to them and what they expect from their local police or Sheriff will play an important role in determining what the department works on and why it uses its resources the way it does.

The 1974 Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment was among the first to question whether or not police strategies did what they were supposed to do and ask how those strategies impacted the people they were designed to serve. The study determined that random patrol did not suppress crime or affect citizen's feelings of security.[8] The results did not conclude that patrol was not useful, according to former Kansas City Police Chief Joseph McNamara, but that officers could spend their time more effectively.[9] A number of studies since that time have examined the efficacy of what is commonly referred to as the "standard" or "professional model" of policing, which consists of random patrol, rapid response to calls for service, and follow-up investigations of all crimes by detectives. In 2004 the National Research Council's Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices, looking at decades of research, determined that "focused policing" was more effective than the standard model.[10]

Problem-oriented policing (POP), developed in 1990 by Herman Goldstein, is the most widely adopted model of focused policing. Goldstein rejected the idea that the police were merely law enforcement officers and actually played a much more complex role in society. He advocated a new approach to police work emphasizing the ends instead of the means, focused efforts to identify and respond to the underlying causes of crime and disorder instead of just its symptoms, and a redefined and expanding relationship between the police and the community.

POP has been widely acknowledged in policing, but unevenly implemented. Years later, Goldstein identified the major impediments to the adoption of POP were an absence of long-term commitment by police leaders, lack of analytical skills by officers, non-existent partnerships between the police and researchers, inadequate financial

support, and the absence of informed outside pressures to change. “The public as a whole,” according to Goldstein, “is woefully ignorant about the nature of the police function and the capacity of the police.”<sup>[11]</sup> Nevertheless, the implementation POP techniques by police agencies have resulted in successful outcomes. One such example is the Chula Vista, California Police Department’s effort to reduce motel crime and disorder, the 2009 winner of the Center for Problem Oriented Policing’s Goldstein Award. In that community, the police, in collaboration with other city departments, developed an ordinance that promoted third-party policing by holding motels accountable for excessive service calls. As a result, service calls declined by 45%, crime by 68%, and motels reported increased revenues and an expanded clientele.

Many police agencies, buoyed by federal COPS grants, formed specialized Community Policing units rather than finding ways to distribute new work methods broadly throughout all levels of the department. Now that federal funding for Community Policing and POP has been discontinued, many of the specialized units have been reduced or disappeared all together, stalling or reversing the gains acquired through nearly two decades of substantial efforts. Goldstein’s list of hurdles faced by POP suggests that departments can ill afford another try at implementation during tough fiscal times, but that is not necessarily accurate. Although federal funding for Community Oriented Policing has been significantly reduced, there are two relatively simple measures departments could take to integrate POP into routine functions:

1. Establish an in-service Community Policing Training Program for officers who have completed the Field Training Officer Program and who have some patrol experience, but are still on probationary status. The program, which could be

completed in about four weeks, should be based within the Patrol division as an extension of the conventional program. Training officers with active caseloads would demonstrate POP techniques and strategies to trainees as they work together on actual projects.

2. Assign police supervisors the responsibility to actively manage POP projects. A clear statement of purpose from the Chief or Sheriff, hands-on applications in a learning environment, followed by mentoring and active participation by supervisors will convince officers POP is an integral component of policing and important to the department.

POP must be de-specialized and distributed throughout the department not only to survive, but to flourish. Barry Bluestone, the director of the Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University, argues that the public sector and its unions will have to “improve productivity, improve the services they offer and find innovative ways to deliver them” or the public will look for better alternatives.[12] If POP were to be incorporated by every officer—magnifying its potential for reducing crime—it is reasonable to say the best POP initiatives remain to be realized.

### **INNOVATE THROUGH COLLABORATION**

The High Point, North Carolina Police Department faced a problem common throughout the nation: an open air drug market, plagued by violence and prostitution, taking place in a neighborhood full of fearful or resentful residents. Increased enforcement efforts made little, if any, difference. So, the police decided to try something new. They asked a professor at John Jay College to look at the situation and offer advice.

Local police ended up talking to community leaders, identified the drug dealers with a propensity for violence, and then approached dealers using a multi-disciplinary team to inform them they were being closely monitored and would be vigorously prosecuted if they did not stop their activities. Then the social services representative asked them what they needed to get a job. The intervention was not about arrest and prosecution—those were just tools—it was about making the neighborhood livable for its residents and it worked. Nearly all the dealers complied and residents were satisfied because they felt safer in their neighborhoods and confident the police were responsive to their problems.[13] The point here is not whether this one particular technique will work everywhere; it may not, but strategies based on new ideas and approaches hold great promise. The point is that the police can increase their effectiveness through consulting, collaboration, and innovation.

The police possess a specialized body of knowledge, but there is simply no way any one discipline can access all the ideas and tools that are available. As General David Petraeus formulated a new strategy for Iraq in 2007 he consulted a “wonky group of Ph.D.s” for advice and assistance.[14] Forming a collaborative relationship with a reputable researcher or academic institution allows the department to assess the efficacy of its crime prevention and enforcement efforts, investigative alternate strategies, and brings a fresh set of ideas to the table which might challenge assumption long taken for granted within the policing industry. Police agencies should no longer be satisfied with models based solely on intuition, anecdote, or received wisdom. Law enforcement, and, more importantly the public, will benefit from multi-disciplinary problem-solving approaches.

## CONCLUSION

A police agency that knows what it is capable of, what the people it serves want most, how to use its resources most effectively, and is willing to consider new ideas to solve old problems is well positioned to succeed in preventing and reducing crime and improving the quality of life in the communities it serves.

Whenever the Great Recession finally ends, it's unlikely the economy that emerges will be the same as the economy it replaced. An improved economy may relieve some of these pressures, but police officers are among the best paid civil servants and cities and counties will be cautious of adding locally funded positions. This article was not intended to address every conceivable strategy that could result in cost savings; its aim was to provide the chief executive with some ideas to more fully integrate police agencies with the communities they serve, to advocate for an alternative to eliminating community oriented policing strategies, and to suggest a practical program to make better use of whatever resources are left after all the budgets have been cut.

### Notes:

- [1] "63 Percent of Local Police Departments Are Facing Cuts in Their Total Funding," <http://www.policeforum.org/news.asp> (accessed April 2, 2009).
- [2] Robert Samuelson, "California's Reckoning—and ours," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, August 3, 2009, A9.
- [3] Robert Trojanowicz and Hazel Harder, "The Status of Contemporary Policing Programs." National Center for Community Policing, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University (1985).
- [4] John Campbell, Joseph Brann and David Williams. "Officer-per-thousand formulas & other Policing Myths: A Leadership Model for Better Police Resource Management" (Portland, Oregon: Campbell DeLong Resources, Inc., 2003), 3.

- [5] *Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project Year 15/2009 Comprehensive Report* (Capitola, California: United Way of Santa Cruz County, 2009), 156.
- [6] Canadian model: “The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention: Building Safer Communities”  
<http://www.acsa-caah.ca/Portals/0/Member/PDF/en/documents/nationalstrat.pdfadfd>  
(accessed December 14, 2009).  
Australian Model: “Orange Community Plan 2007-11”  
<http://www.orange.nsw.gov.au/go/building-our-city/safety-in-our-city/crime-prevention-plan>  
(accessed December 14, 2009).
- [7] Office of the City Auditor, *Report to the City Council City of San Jose: An Audit of the Police Department-Bureau of Field Operations Patrol Divisions Staffing and Deployment* (February 2000), 27.
- [8] George Kelling, Tony Pate, Duane Dieckman, and Charles Brown. *The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment: A Summary Report* (Washington D.C.: Police Foundation, 1974), 34.
- [9] Joseph McNamara, personal communication, March 25, 2009.
- [10] Wesley Skogan and Kathleen Frydl, eds. *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing: The Evidence* (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2004), 4-5.
- [11] Herman Goldstein, *Problem Oriented Policing: From Innovation to Mainstream*, Edited by Johannes Knutsson (New York: Criminal Justice Press, 2003) 26-34.
- [12] *The Economist*, “Pubic Sector Unions: Welcome to the Real World.” December 12, 2009, 32.
- [13] *The Economist*, “Crime and Politics: The Velvet Glove.” October 24, 2009, 33.
- [14] Thomas Ricks, “The COINdinistas, *Foreign Policy*, December 2009, 63.