

HOW THE BART POLICE DEPARTMENT IS REBUILDING THE
COMMUNITY TRUST

by

Andy Alkire
San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Police Department

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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 THE BART POLICE DEPARTMENT IS REBUILDING THE COMMUNITY TRUST

By Lieutenant Andy Alkire

All it takes is one act, one incident, one event to damage or destroy the reputation and trust between a police department and the community it serves. In the case of the thirty-seven year old Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Police Department, that one incident took place on January 1, 2009.

A single gunshot; fired mistakenly by a BART police officer who thought he was firing his Taser. This act, the shooting of a resistive suspect in the back, occurred in front of hundreds of transit patrons celebrating New Years Eve. As is well-documented today, a number of patrons were recording the incident using cell phones and cameras. The event was forever burned into the psyche of the world when it was then uploaded onto various social networks on the World Wide Web for millions to view. Almost immediately, every ounce of trust between the Transit Police and their public was lost. Further, anyone associated with it entered a time of challenge for their commitment to the communities they served.

In an effort to start building back the trust of patrons, communities served and others committed to the District, the elected BART Board of Directors mandated various changes in the organization. This included more training, a top to bottom review of the entire Department, a police review committee and a police auditor. The police review commission and police auditor positions required a California state legislative process which was signed into law nineteen months after the incident.

Certainly, the process of rebuilding trust and one's public image is slow, sometimes painful, and fraught with worry. For BART and the BART Police, though, working to rebuild trust is their top priority. This is that story.

Why is community trust so important for a transit police department?

Transit police departments are on a constant mission to built trust between themselves and the communities they serve. Why is this, when it is often hard to define what "community" it is they serve? Is it the 370,000 daily patrons and 3500 employees of the transit system? Is it the surrounding businesses, schools, neighborhoods and churches directly affected by their proximity to the transit system? Or is it the entire regional area? BART Police Department's new Chief of Police, Kenton Rainey, believes the Department needs to build relationships with a global community.

Chief Rainey grew up using public transportation in the Chicago area. He makes it a point to use public transportation whenever and wherever he travels. He trusts public transportations systems and has a strong connection with them. He also believes that, to reach the global community, a transit police department needs to start with the local rider. Rainey believes it is the local patron that can help send the message globally, using some of the same social networks that helped break the trust. They can help identify BART Police Department as reliable, trustworthy and providing the safe environment within the BART system (Rainey, 2010).

One of Rainey's centerpiece efforts is to have BART PD members meet with daily riders, as well as engage in face to face meetings with the local business community. He believes it is these businesses employees who use the BART system daily to get to and from work, and that the BART PD needs to interact with those

businesses, large and small (Rainey,2010). The belief is that by denying any of these members or sections of the communities the opportunity to communicate with their transit police, the Department is losing out on an opportunity to know those that we serve. Chief Rainey believes that face to face interaction with the stakeholders in our various communities is the best way to open up dialog, create good will and the entry way to reaching a global community. Others in the BART organization concur.

BART Board of Director Carol Ward Allen represents the Oakland, California area of the BART District. She is the former BART Board President and currently chairs the BART Police Review Committee. She is an active member of the Oakland community, and teaches African American Studies at Laney Junior Collage in Oakland (Ward Allen, 2010). Ms. Ward Allen believes that a transit community, though running through many cities, is regional. She acknowledges the needs of one area of the region may be different then another in the same region. She recognizes that Oakland's transit needs are different, for instance, than those of people living in the city of Walnut Creek. Both communities have the BART system running through them and are geographically only fifteen miles apart. But their demands and needs can be quite different (Ward Allen, 2010)

Both Chief Rainey and Board Member Ward Allan believe that communities rely on the trust built between them and the transit police department serving them. They both believe that having strong relationships will pay dividends, both in good times and in bad.

Where do we go now?

Following the events of January 1, 2009 many changes were mandated by stakeholders in the various communities the BART PD serves. A top-to- bottom review of the entire Police Department by the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) was conducted from June to September 2009 (NOBLE, 2009). Their report looked at organizational structure and policies, and made various observations of what the police department was doing right. They concluded with recommendations to address deficiencies.

The recommendations included changes in recruitment, training, policies, and the need to be more involved in the communities the Police Department served. The report noted no real organized attempt to reach out to the community was being coordinated (NOBLE, p. 182, 2010). It acknowledged that community meetings were being attended, and that officers were going to local schools, fairs and events. In these cases, though, it was usually an event organizer reaching out to BART PD and not the Department seeking inclusion within the community. This is one area that was resonant to the Board, and where effort is already being made.

Director Ward Allan believes transit police departments should also be involved with youth (Ward Allen, 2010). She believes by building trust with the youth, one will build trust for generations to come. One means of outreach for youth could include those in place at local Police Athletic Leagues and teen centers.

She believes programs set up within the faith based communities are a benefit to any police department. She recalls that following the January 1, 2009 shooting it was the spiritual leaders that attended the meetings and asking the hard questions about how this

could have happened. She thinks if that trust had been in place within the churches prior to the shooting the BART police department would have had the support of those church leaders which would have kept the local community calm.

What types of trust building tools should we use?

Using the NOBLE report as a road map, BART PD has addressed many of the identified concerns. These range from recruiting employees from the communities being served. This is being done by using local paper and radio ads, and attending local job fairs. Another effort is expanding presence at National Night Out, where in 2009 officers worked with local community leaders in and around various BART stations to spread a message of crime prevention and community good. Mandated training in areas such as talking with today's youth and racial profiling have been added as annual training courses for all sworn officers. Departmental policies and procedures are also being strategically updated. The Department is also designing a community policing team to reach out and be in contact with the various communities and organizations serving those communities.

The Department elected to continue and build on the success of existing programs, such as its annual holiday food drive which raises donations from within the department to buy holiday food and gifts to deliver at Christmas to needy local families. The K-9 program also participates at local schools, law enforcement events, scouting events and county fairs.

Chief Rainey plans to build a strategic plan using local stakeholders (Rainey, 2010). He believes the Department needs to know and acknowledge who its stakeholders are. A starting point for this work is to include local faith based communities, Chambers

of Commerce and the service clubs, such as Rotary. He is working to develop face to face contact with those stakeholders to begin re-establishing the initial trust. He will then include some of them in the strategic planning process, as well as having them assist in developing a department mission and vision statement.

One extremely popular way to help building the community's trust is to communicate with up-to-the-minute information through social networks. Both Chief Rainey and Director Ward Allan like the idea of using social networking sites to stay in touch with patrons, as well to reach out to various communities and organizations. Social networks are a strong and viable tool for transit police agencies to notify those affected by the transit system, weather for a short time or daily, of current events which affect their mode of transportation.

BART Senior Web Producer Melissa Jordan believes social networks put a face on an agency and makes it easy to open up a dialog with those who are looking to do so (Jordan, 2010). Managing social networks can be difficult during tough economic times when budgets are tight and personnel are needed in other areas of the Police Department. To use as a social networking as a trust building tool, though, the information needs to be accurate and timely. Currently the BART PD does not manage a social network per se, although BART uses various social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Chief Rainey does like the idea of a Department social network site, but it is not a priority for him. He believes in more face to face engagement due to the value that will bring to helping build the communities trust. He has viewed other law enforcement social network sites, but wants to have a more current and attractive web site in place as a

tool the public can use to contact the police department and as a tool to attract possible applicants.

Conclusion

The officer who mistakenly shot the young man on the platform has been convicted of involuntary manslaughter and is awaiting sentencing. Originally charged with murder and tried in a courtroom outside the Bay Area, he has shown remorse and regret for this tragic accident. Immediately after the shooting there was small rioting in the Bay Area. Tensions were high again during the trial nineteen months after the incident. Thanks to communications and hard work between the BART PD and local government, churches and businesses, hostilities and uncertainties were kept low. The work BART committed to after the event of January 1, 2009 seems to have paid off. The Transit District and its Police Department are continuing to work hard to keep the community trust they, and the public, desire.

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