

**ADVANCING COMMUNITY POLICING
BALANCING THE CRIME FIGHTER WITH THE SERVICE PROVIDER
IN A MID-SIZED POLICE DEPARTMENT**

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.

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A typical radio call goes out to two young officers at the Anywhere Police Department about a domestic violence situation at a residence. The call involves a husband and wife who have been arguing for the past several hours. Upon arrival, the officers separate the husband and wife. Their stories are similar; the incident did not involve physical contact. Rather, it involves financial troubles, family business failure, child care difficulties, and the inability to communicate with each other. After several minutes of superficial counseling and dispensing counseling referral cards, the officers leave. This outcome leaves both the officers and the husband and wife frustrated. The yelling has temporarily stopped....until next time.

Imagine a single program that a mid-sized police department could implement to change this scenario. Imagine a single program that would provide officers skills to understand the true reasons for conflict, one which would educate them about the services offered by their city and how to obtain those services, and one which trained officers to accept non-traditional roles needed by the public. This program could increase the scope of duties and talents of a police officer and, in turn, provide the organizational transformation needed to fully implement the organization's community policing philosophy (Southwest Law Enforcement Institute, 1997). In 2009, the Gardena CA Police Department crafted such a program. What follows is their story; one that exemplifies how community policing concepts can be used to resolve chronic concerns. It is also one others might consider as they face challenges of their own. Before we look at Gardena's success, though, let's briefly examine the issue of what "community policing is, and what state it is in today.

COMMUNITY POLICING'S CURRENT CHALLENGE

Jeremy Travis, in his study *“Police in Transition*, stated “of all government functions, the police function is arguably the most visible, the most immediate, the most intimately involved with the well-being of individuals and the health of a community.” (Travis, 1998) Because of this close relationship with the public, police departments have been placed in a position to become the lead entity to coordinate and serve as a lynchpin amongst city departments, or actually provide more personal and responsive service to the public.

In 2009, Lt. Palmer Wilson, in his study *“Community Policing-Where do we go from here?”* found that police department responsiveness and continual availability has created an increased expectation of providing public services to its citizens and businesses. There is not only an increased expectation of access to service, but also in the scope of services provided by the police.(Wilson, 2009) Peak and Glensor (as cited in Ferreira, 1996) regarded community policing as an excellent opportunity for the government and the police to attend to the needs of their customers in society. The fact that customer satisfaction has become such an important part of business and industrial settings may be partly the reason for this movement in government and police services.

The strategy of community policing has been utilized for over forty years. In 2000, a national survey by the Bureau of Justice found that more than ninety percent of the departments in cities with populations over 250,000 reported having full-time, trained community policing officers in the field. (Bureau of Justice, 2003) This must mean that these departments have mastered the art of community-oriented policing, right? Unfortunately, it has failed to change the status quo for many police departments.

Community policing is often confined to an individual officer or to a select bureau, which isolates the philosophy from the rest of the department. (Southwest Law Enforcement Institute, 1997) This contradicts lessons from the past. In 1987, Herman Goldstein identified three requirements necessary for the police to shift from traditional policing to community oriented policing. (Goldstein, 1987) The first is that community policing needs to be an organizational philosophy integrated into the entire police agency, not just a new project or a temporary specialization. The second is to create a new working environment within police agencies so that new values of policing emerge in the management and tactics of the police. The third identified the need to overcome resistance to community policing from the subculture of policing that focused on danger, authority, and efficiency – the values of more traditional policing. (Goldstein, 1987)

The challenges facing community policing today are similar to those faced in the 1970's. They are: a lack of planning and a through understanding of the concept itself, failure to provide structural changes to mesh with changed direction, new programs being seen as “organizational add-ons,” ideas imposed from the top or from outside the organization without support from lower ranks, and costly ventures yielding little or no empirical evidence to show success. (Wycoff and Keeling, 1978)

If the goal of community policing is to create “a police agency that sees traditional law enforcement not as its primary mission but one important approach to accomplishing the greater mission of enhancing the quality of life for the community as a whole” (Rossiter, 2001), officers need to be trained as to their policing role in the future. Because of the public’s ever increasing expectations on a wide variety of needs, officers roles need to transform from the traditional, yet one dimensional “crime fighter” to a balance between “crime fighter” and “service provider.”

This shift may cause some identification challenges among employees who became officers because of the traditional “crime fighter” persona often associated with police work. Adopting this change in attitude demonstrates to the police and the public that enforcing laws is only one aspect of police activity. Without this change in attitude, police departments will fail to meet the increasing demand for public service. To exemplify this sentiment, the experience of the Gardena Police Department’s work to consolidate the work of the City’s Community Development Department and the Police Department is instructive.

CASE STUDY

In 2009, the Gardena Police Department assumed responsibility for the management of the City’s Community Development Department during a transitional period when the City’s management team was short-staffed, and created an innovative program to change everyday scenarios like the one illustrated at the outset of this article. They implemented a program that temporarily places sworn supervisory personnel in the Community Development Department to supervise city personnel, to facilitate public service needs, and to deal effectively with the public on non-policing matters. The Gardena Police Department built this new program on community policing lessons from the past to address the needs of the public in the future.

Forming collaborative relationships with other city departments, other agencies, academic institutions, and other bureaus within the police department allows police departments to better assess the services they provide on a daily basis. Stemming from Gardena’s award winning District Policing model was the idea to place sworn supervisory staff into another city department to enhance their professional development, to encourage horizontal collaboration

between the police department and all other city departments, and to create a new working environment within the police department which encourages decentralized decision-making.

In an interview in May 2010, Capt. Ed Burnett of the Gardena Police Department explained several conditions in 2009 that made implementation of the program immediately necessary. These dynamics included:

- Gardena Police Chief Edward Medrano identified conditions, such as a downward turn in the economy and the need to consolidate city services to save money. Medrano advised these conditions left little choice but to craft a program to enhance the effectiveness of City services. Making no change would, in his eyes, guarantee the failure of the City of Gardena Community Development Department. (personal communication, June 2009)
- In 2009, sixty percent of the eighty-seven sworn officers in the department had ten years or less on the job. The Police Chief had been in his position for three years, and the remainder of his management staff had less than four years each in their ranks. Although this could be viewed as a lack of experience, it proved to be beneficial because the employees were open to change and not handcuffed to the ways of the past
- There was an urgency to provide training and opportunities for professional development because of the inexperience of the department
- The Police Department enjoyed support from the city manager, the city council, and the police union. In addition, the Department had developed a strong relationship with the residents and businesses in the community

- The Police Department serves a population of approximately 70,000. This size is ideal for this program because mid-sized cities often enjoy community perceptions that are perhaps more positive than larger departments, and are more nimble because they lack layers of hierarchy evident in big cities. This allows for flexibility and innovation. (Phillipps, 2010)

During his analysis, Chief Ed Medrano found that some of the duties handled by the Community Development Department are similar and fit cohesively within the current organizational framework of the Police Department. Duties such as licensing, code enforcement, and building and planning, while not traditionally supervised or implemented by a police department, reinforce the idea that the policing role is one of a service provider, rather than just a crime fighter. Analyzing functions which a police supervisor would not be familiar with, such as planning or building, Medrano found although the supervisor may not possess the technical skills associated with Community Development, the supervisor does possess the skills necessary to supervise those employees and ensure tasks are completed on schedule.

To aid employees in their collaborative efforts, Medrano made modifications to the Police Department's organization chart. Managers were tasked with supervising a variety of different units and bureaus which perform entirely different functions. For example, one lieutenant was assigned to supervise the community oriented policing team which incorporates all quality of life enforcement issues. The code enforcement officers who handle most of the quality of life issues in Gardena, though, were assigned to the sergeant in the Community Development program. At times, this caused conflict because of overlapping duties and responsibilities. To resolve these conflicts, managers and sergeants were forced to work together

to find a solution and to clarify responsibilities. Communication between managers became more frequent.

This collaboration proved beneficial not only for the operation of Community Development, but throughout the entire City. In an interview in May 2010, Medrano commented that common arguments regarding which bureau or unit is most important became obsolete. He believes that he forced collaboration amongst managers by blurring the line between their responsibilities (Medrano, May 2010). Gardena Police employees soon realized they need each other, are all interdependent, and no bureau or unit can complete the mission of becoming a premier law enforcement agency alone.

By placing sworn supervisory personnel into Community Development, Medrano found that not only did officers gain insight as to the public's true needs and wants outside of the law enforcement arena, but the officers infused community policing principles into their new areas of responsibility. In the same interview in May 2010, Chief Medrano felt that assigning sworn supervisory personnel in Community Development develops officers with a broader perspective on their role, and pushes supervisors to be more tolerant of differing viewpoints. He illustrated this point by explaining how a sergeant assigned to Community Development changed his supervisory style and approach based on the fact that he was supervising civilian employees who had no experience working in a paramilitary organizational structure. In short, this challenge broadened the sergeant's ability to supervise.

Chief Medrano cited the increase in new City of Gardena business licenses to illustrate the added effectiveness the Police Department has brought to the Community Development Department since beginning this program in late 2009.

City of Gardena New Business Licenses
November 2009 thru May 2010

57 Nov '09	48 Dec '09	60 Jan '10	60 Feb '10	92 Mar '10	106 Apr '10	146 May '10
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The chart reflects that patrol and code enforcement officers now better understand the processes in community development; thus, they now actively encourage unlicensed businesses they encounter in the field to come into compliance with city regulations. Prior to this program, patrol officers would not consider this issue during their normal daily activities. This increase in licenses adds revenue to the city and eliminates some complaints experienced by patrol officers in the field because businesses are in compliance with city regulations.

Program benefits

The maturation of officers via this program benefits the public by giving officers a more accurate understanding of the needs and wants of the public because of the daily face-to-face interactions they encounter while serving the public in Community Development. Through this accuracy, public trust increases because the public believes that the police understand their true needs, the police are able to fulfill those needs competently, and officers are willing to accept any task to fulfill those needs. Medrano believes this is the essence of public service.

Although the move to blend the two departments has been successful, City management may eventually desire to separate their chains of command in the future. Due to this possibility, Medrano put careful consideration into developing an exit strategy. His concerns were threefold:

- Ensure the police supervisor does not become too intertwined into the operation of Community Development

- Ensure the program does not become “over-used” thus decreasing its effectiveness.
- Ensure that community members do not develop concerns that police officers are consistently working outside their normal scope of work

Medrano felt that if circumstances arose that necessitated officers to be withdrawn from Community Development, the exodus must cause little or no disruption in the services Community Development provides to the public. To prevent such disruption, focus was sustained to ensure Police personnel were assigned in both controlled and limited capacities.

To date, Medrano feels the program has increased customer satisfaction to those needing services provided by the Community Development Department. It has also stretched sworn supervisors like no other program. There was a slight amount of resistance from existing Community Development personnel at the outset. After working alongside their sworn supervisors for the past six months, though, those same employees have complied with their new expectations and have embraced the new vision.

Conclusion

Gardena’s program focuses on the training and collaboration required to move a police department from traditional policing into community policing. Placing police officers in other city departments provides an answer to mid-sized police departments searching to enhance their community policing efforts, while also improving their policing service delivery and increasing customer satisfaction. For Gardena, this program has developed police officers who are prepared to conquer the challenges facing policing in the future because they have mastered the balance between crime fighter and service provider. Their program is a roadmap for policing agencies searching to transcend to community policing.

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