NEW ERA OF PUBLIC SAFETY

AN ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR FAIR, SAFE, AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY POLICING

III. I AM CONCERNED ABOUT … MY COMMUNITY'S APPROACH TO POLICING

Our society's approach to public safety is structured so that law enforcement is present in nearly every aspect of American life.

Police officers are in our schools, at scenes of mental health crises, and even in coffee shops arresting people. This type of "proactive policing" undermines public safety; when people do not feel safe, they are not safe. Making matters worse, proactive policing creates a culture that positions officers as "warriors" who enforce the law rather than as "guardians" of public safety.

Under this type of proactive approach to policing, departments formally or informally measure officers' performance by the number of tickets they issue or arrests they make. It involves saturating communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income communities with police officers. And it can result in adverse effects: residents of these communities are subject to disproportionate rates of traffic stops, stop-and-frisk tactics, and discriminatory enforcement of low-level offenses, such as disorderly conduct, drinking in public, loitering, and marijuana possession. In some cities, such as Ferguson, Missouri, police departments raise significant revenues through fines, fees, and seizure of property.[24] In other words, some departments finance their activities by overpolicing targeted communities.

Your advocacy can encourage departments to take a community-centered approach that embraces a guardian mindset — which is widely regarded as a more effective and lasting approach to building public safety.[25]

Some departments promote "broken windows" policing as a form of community policing, but there are significant differences between the two:

Community Policing

+ Engages all community members in meaningful decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of departmental policies, practices, and priorities. Police leaders value community perspectives, especially of those most impacted by policing.

+ Emphasizes prevention and problem-solving over arrests and criminalization.

+ Promotes fair and equal treatment of all community members and judicious use of resources to promote public safety rather than to criminalize minor offenses.

Broken Windows Policing

× Does not involve community members in creating or implementing policies, in overseeing department practices, or in holding officers and departments accountable for systemic problems. Police leaders prioritize input from community members who support aggressive enforcement of minor offenses.

× Emphasizes quotas for stops and arrests over prevention and problem-solving.

× Targets youth of color, people experiencing homelessness, and people believed to be engaged in prostitution and street vending for aggressive enforcement of minor offenses.

Key Challenges

Lack of accountability:

A lack of accountability for police officers to the communities that they are meant to protect and serve prohibits trust-building. Law enforcement is accountable to all community members, including people of color, women, gender nonconforming people, LGBTQ people, youth, undocumented immigrants, people with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities, religious and ethnic groups, low-income people, people experiencing homelessness, and people suspected or accused of violating the law.

Lack of familiarity:

Some police officers do not live in the communities they work in. This can create problems if officers are not aware of community dynamics, culture, or social problems.

Lack of community input:

Community policing is essential to improving public safety. Some departments develop policies and practices, mission statements, organizational structures, strategic plans, and priorities without community input.

Lack of trust:

High-profile police shootings of unarmed Black people and other incidents of police misconduct, coupled with heavy enforcement of low-level offenses, have eroded trust in law enforcement in many communities — and especially in communities of color. This lack of trust strains police-community relationships and undermines public safety.

Making Change

Adopt a community policing philosophy.
Police departments should adopt community policing as their key operational philosophy and embrace a guardian mindset to policing that is reflected in mission statements, strategic plans, and day-to-day operations.

End "broken windows" policing.
Departments should end "broken windows" and other policing models that emphasize the quantity of tickets and arrests over the quality and effectiveness of policing.

Interact with communities.
Departments should work to form trusting relationships with communities by creating opportunities for officers to engage with community members to increase understanding of societal causes and consequences of social problems.

Reallocate resources.
Departments should divert resources from other budgetary areas and invest more in community policing.

Require trainings on community policing.
Departments should train officers in the goals and methods of community policing. Community members should be directly involved in the development and delivery of trainings.

Implement policies for engagement with specific groups.
Departments should implement policies for encounters with people who have limited English proficiency, who are Deaf or hard of hearing, or who have other disabilities that affect communication.

Collaborate with communities.
Departments should collaborate with communities to improve safety by:

+ Identifying strategies to make communities safer

+ Increasing interactions between police officers and community members in non-enforcement settings

+ Creating comprehensive community-outreach programs

Value community input.
Departments should establish a formal role for community members to publicly evaluate and provide feedback to departments. This process should include, but not be limited to:

- Neighborhood meetings and councils

- Complaint and compliment forms in alternative and accessible formats

- Online surveys

- Public fora on policy changes

- Advisory groups representing communities directly impacted by policing practices, including people of color, women, LGBTQ people, youth, immigrants and people with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities, religious and ethnic groups, low-income people, and people experiencing homelessness

Establish formal structures for community input.

Departments should establish formalized structures and resources to get community members' feedback about:

- Decision-making around policies, priorities, and day-to-day operations

- Training

- Accountability for officers who violate departmental policies and practices

- Development, implementation, and oversight of specific policies and procedures governing policing of marginalized communities that emphasize effective communication and engagement

Reconcile with the community.

To build trust, departments should acknowledge the long and complex history between communities of color and police officers. Restorative justice and reconciliation models open lines of communication and create opportunities for engagement.

Enforce procedural justice principles.

Every aspect of a department's work should incorporate the principles, goals, and objectives of procedural justice internally and externally.

Create staffs that reflect the community.

Departments should focus on recruiting, retaining, and promoting applicants from historically underrepresented groups in the policing profession, such as people of color and women.

Develop performance measures that reflect community policing.

Departments should evaluate officers based on community policing principles and practices, such as engaging and collaborating with community members, solving problems with community input, and tracking satisfaction with policing services.

Provide incentives.

Departments should reward officers for resolving encounters without resorting to use of force, and for treating all community members — including those suspected or accused of violating the law — fairly and respectfully.

End the use of police in schools as a solution to student discipline.
Some school districts are increasingly turning disciplinary matters over to school police — sworn police officers who are deployed to schools to improve safety and prevent crime, often under the mantle of community policing. This model often relies on arrests to address student discipline, usually for minor age-appropriate behaviors, and funnels youth, especially students of color, into the school-to-prison pipeline.[26] There are better ways to manage student discipline and keep students safe. Instead of police, schools should have professionals who are trained to handle disruptive behavior in school, such as counselors, mental health professionals, community intervention workers, and restorative justice coordinators.

How to Advocate for Change

Advocate for community policing.
Pressure your mayor and city legislators to require your local police department to adopt community policing as its key operational philosophy. Pressure the chief of your local police department to implement community policing principles and practices throughout the department, and ensure that all officers — not just a designated few — apply these principles and practices to their work. Also, make sure your police department's decision-making processes include representatives from communities that are most directly impacted by policing.

Exercise your electoral power.
Make a commitment to make community policing a central issue in every election season and a condition of your support for candidates for office on both the state and local levels.

Get involved in the hiring process.
Pressure your mayor and city legislators to hire a police chief who has demonstrated a commitment to community policing principles and practices.

Talking Points

Community policing increases public safety.

When communities and police departments collaborate to co-produce and implement a vision of public safety for all members of a community, and when police officers treat people fairly and respectfully, community members and officers are safer.

Community policing reflects 21st-century policing principles and practices.

Community policing principles and practices have been endorsed and promoted by the Department of Justice's Office on Community Oriented Policing Services, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, and many law enforcement associations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, and the Major County Sheriffs of America.

Overcoming Opposition

The Opposition:

"Community policing takes valuable resources away from fighting crime. Police officers are not social workers and should not be wasting their time at community meetings or taking orders from community members."

Overcoming the Opposition:

"Police officers are public servants and must be deeply engaged with all members of the communities they serve to ensure safety for all. That cannot be accomplished without strong relationships with, and accountability to, communities."

IX. ENDNOTES

III. I am Concerned About ...

24   *See* "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department." United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. March 4, 2015. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf.

25   Rahr, Sue and Rice, Stephen. (2015). From Warriors to Guardians: Recommitting American Police Culture to Democratic Ideals. NCJRS. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/248654.pdf.

26   See "Education Under Arrest: The Case Against Police in Schools." Justice Policy Institute. November 2011. Retrieved from http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf.

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Conference

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