

Chapter 9. Community Policing

Overview

This chapter describes community policing in relation to Weed and Seed sites. It presents useful steps for implementing community policing and describes key implementation issues.

Vision

Community policing is a philosophy and style of policing that a law enforcement agency adopts to guide its delivery of services in Weed and Seed areas. The initial step in the Weed and Seed process is to weed out the criminal elements before providing seeds in terms of prevention, treatment, and neighborhood restoration. The bridge between the weeding and seeding components is community policing.

Community policing officers assigned to a Weed and Seed area are a mainstay of the strategy. They become involved with the community and help guide the site's initial law enforcement efforts to make the area safe and secure.

Community policing officers provide continuity and maintain community safety and peace by communicating and forming partnerships, stimulating community mobilization, and encouraging prevention programs and community restoration efforts.

Community policing is defined by its two key components: community engagement and problem solving. Community engagement is an ongoing process between the police and the public. The public includes residents, businesses, government agencies, schools, hospitals, community-based organizations, and visitors.

Community engagement takes place in several ways. It occurs in formal meetings with the police and in routine contacts on street corners. Any contact between police and citizens is an opportunity for community engagement. The ideal is to formalize these public relationships through collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders. These stakeholders are critical for several reasons. Many of them provide services to the Weed and Seed area. Each stakeholder can offer police insight into the problems faced by the community and potential solutions to the serious and violent crime problems. Because of their shared responsibility for the community and their understanding of the issues, stakeholders are important resources for implementing programs designed to address problems.

Preventing crime and enforcing the law are traditional police functions. Community policing expands the police officer's role beyond enforcing the law and arresting criminals to identifying and responding to problems associated with crime and disorder in the designated area. The manner in which the police undertake problem solving and how they and the community relate to each other determine the success of community policing. For community policing to be successful, the police must understand the local conditions that give rise to problems associated with crime and criminal behavior. Developing and implementing solutions to these problems, as well as determining the impact of the solutions by obtaining feedback from the community, sets community policing apart from more traditional law enforcement.

Therefore, the processes of community engagement (and partnership development) and

problem solving are central to the concept and practice of community policing and are inseparable. Partnering with the community without solving its problems provides no meaningful service to the public. If community policing efforts engage in problem solving without developing collaborative partnerships, they risk overlooking the most pressing community concerns and tackling problems that are of little interest to the community, sometimes using tactics that residents find objectionable. Furthermore, because community members know what goes on locally and have access to resources that may be important for addressing problems, involving them in problem solving is vital to gaining information and mobilizing community responses. Meaningful community partnerships improve police accountability. The most important element of an improved engagement process is communication between the police and residents.

Implementation Process

The steps required to implement community policing programs in the designated areas closely parallel those for planning Weed and Seed implementation. In fact, planning for community policing programs can be done simultaneously with, and borrowing extensively from, the Weed and Seed implementation process.

Step 1: Create a Community Policing Partnership With the Designated Area

Successful implementation of community policing in Weed and Seed areas depends on the involvement and commitment of government and tribal agencies, community residents, and community organizations and other institutions. Commitment grows from involvement. Entities with interests in the community have unique goals, objectives, and missions that must be considered and blended through a collaborative

process in planning implementation of community policing.

For these reasons, the first step is for Weed and Seed staff, in conjunction with the police, to put together a broad-based coalition to serve as the planning and oversight group for the community policing effort. The police can be the catalyst for the effort but should not control it. Control must come from the community, the city or tribal jurisdiction, and other agencies participating in the site's community policing partnership.

The partnership should include local, state, tribal, and federal government agencies; private for profit and nonprofit organizations; civic groups; religious institutions; police; neighborhood associations; and residents. The group should also have a direct link to the Weed and Seed Steering Committee.

The following are some responsibilities of the Weed and Seed site's community policing partnership:

- Create the community policing implementation plan.
- Develop goals and objectives, and identify community problems and alternative solutions.
- Help bring resources to bear on the problems.
- Coordinate with others on problem solving (e.g., Steering Committee, other city or tribal agencies).
- Oversee and monitor alternative programs and activities aimed at solving problems.

The community policing partnership group should meet regularly during the implementation process and take care to document plans, problems, attempted solutions, and results.

Step 2: Determine Community Characteristics

As part of the Weed and Seed implementation process, the Steering Committee selects the localities for Weed and Seed and community policing, and Steering Committee staff conduct a community needs assessment. This step builds on that assessment step and develops greater detail, specifically related to crime, fear of crime, and community safety.

Much of the needed sociodemographic and crime-related information is collected during the needs assessment from official records, including citizen complaints and crime reports. This step requires collection of new and more detailed information on area characteristics. A door-to-door census of the community, including all businesses and a representative sample of residences, is conducted. The size of the residential sample depends on the number of residences in the selected area.

The police should take the lead in conducting the survey. Some agencies have used civilian police aides, volunteers, and other city personnel to assist with surveys. A survey instrument should be developed in conjunction with the community partnership and pilot-tested to ensure its validity and reliability. All members of the survey team should be trained and given a protocol for conducting the survey.



Agencies that lack experience in doing surveys can consult a local university or researcher for assistance. In addition, the federal government has two free resources: *A Police Guide to Surveying Citizens and Their Environment* (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993) and *Conducting Community Surveys: A Practical Guide for Law Enforcement Agencies* (Bureau of Justice Statistics and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1999).

The purposes of the survey are to—

- Identify crime and other quality-of-life issues.
- Advise residents of the new community policing program and how they can contribute to its success.
- Determine whether residents are willing to participate in some capacity and support the new program.

Identify the community's assets (e.g., people willing to take a leadership role and public resources) and liabilities (e.g., signs of decay and neglect such as abandoned vehicles, code violations, graffiti, neglected children, and homeless people). Determine whether the Steering Committee is already doing this task before beginning it.

The information obtained from the survey should be recorded and carefully analyzed to reveal trends and patterns.

Step 3: Develop an Information and Communication Network

Two essential building blocks for community engagement and problem solving are information and communication. Police departments need to develop new information sources and merge existing sources into a community policing information network. This information should be communicated to the partnership

group and other neighborhood stakeholders. Residents can contribute facts and insights that might be helpful to the police and the information base.

The information network includes intelligence (e.g., tips from residents or informants) and routinely collected records (e.g., calls for service, crime reports, field interrogation information). Several police agencies have automated information networks that provide local officers with data useful for problem solving and community engagement.

Communicating information is as essential as collecting it. Community policing officers must develop ways to communicate information such as repeat calls for service and reported crimes, police and government resources committed to

Weed and Seed, and programs planned for the residents. By providing this information, police enhance their credibility with residents and increase the likelihood that residents will reciprocate by giving the police useful information.

Step 4: Assess and Develop Resources

This step borrows from the Weed and Seed implementation process. The Weed and Seed Steering Committee must identify and assess available resources and develop additional needed resources.

The list of resources should be prepared with community policing in mind. This information should be readily available to the community policing partnership group. The group should review the resources list and add to it as needed.

Exhibit 9–1. Ways To Communicate Information to Residents

Newsletters. The community policing partnership group can provide information through a regular newsletter. Although many established neighborhood associations have newsletters, they may not be located in Weed and Seed sites. A newsletter keeps people informed who are interested in the effort but are unable to attend neighborhood meetings.

Neighborhood meetings. The community policing partnership group should meet regularly and exchange information. In addition, community policing officers should attend meetings of other organized groups such as business associations, public housing tenant associations, community-based organizations, and local affiliates of national organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, United Way).

Hotlines. Most hotlines or tiplines are used to obtain information from citizens (e.g., the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' 800 number to report individuals carrying or selling firearms). A special phone number can be used by the police to provide information through recorded messages, which can be changed frequently and can provide information on various subjects such as recent crimes, safety tips, how to organize a Neighborhood Watch program, and how to schedule a police security survey of your home or business.

Walking citizen encounters. In community policing, everyday citizen encounters by officers must be viewed as an opportunity to exchange information. While walking a beat or staffing a storefront office, officers should be oriented and trained to convert an otherwise casual citizen encounter into a community engagement or problem-solving opportunity. For example, during an exchange, a resident may comment that a relative looks like he is on drugs. The officer should educate the resident on drug-use warning signs to verify the resident's suspicions; advise the resident on alternative courses of action, including counseling provided under Weed and Seed; and, depending on the circumstances, question the relative to obtain information about the source of drugs coming into the neighborhood.

Media. The media are always useful sources for communicating information about Weed and Seed. Community policing officers should rely on the department's public information professionals to deal with the media.

Step 5: Develop an Implementation Plan

This step mirrors other steps in the Weed and Seed implementation process: identify goals, objectives, and implementation activities and develop an implementation schedule.

The emphasis on prevention, especially youth crime prevention, is fundamental to effective community policing in Weed and Seed sites. Implementation activities should include community policing officers working with youth clubs and other outreach agencies. Through these activities community policing officers can serve as positive role models and mentors for many troubled youth.

Step 6: Collaborate on Problem Solving

Community policing officers, while engaging community residents through the partnership, work with the group on problem solving. The process should use a model such as SARA (scanning–analysis–response–assessment). The group (1) scans and identifies neighborhood problems, (2) analyzes the problems together, (3) discusses and decides on programs or activities to respond to the problems and works together to implement those programs or activities, and (4) assesses the results of the programs or activities.

The key to making community policing work is to involve the community in a collaborative

Exhibit 9–2. Sample Implementation Plan

Goal 1:	Reduce violent crime by 50 percent.	Goal 2:	Reduce resident fear of crime.
Objective:	Increase observable police presence in the neighborhood.	Objective:	Improve contact and communication with residents.
Tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add six officers to the walking patrol. ● Use off-duty officers for saturation patrol during peak times. ● Coordinate with task force sweeps, search warrants, and other field activities. 	Tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish monthly newsletter through a neighborhood association. ● Police officers and supervisors attend monthly neighborhood association meetings. ● Open a storefront office in the neighborhood.
Objective:	Coordinate information with the appropriate law enforcement task force.	Objective:	Provide crime prevention education and training to residents.
Tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community policing supervisors meet weekly with the task force. ● Share intelligence and police records with the task force. 	Tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish a program to conduct home and business security surveys. ● Establish Neighborhood Watch programs.

relationship with the police, other agencies, and neighborhood or tribal organizations. One suggestion to help implement community policing is to start on small problems that are nonetheless significant to the partnership group. Initial successes are critical in developing and maintaining community support. Graffiti removal, trash cleanup, and neighborhood sporting events or cookouts are examples of small joint activities.

The problem-solving process and the partnership's implementation of new programs and activities are ongoing efforts that must be continually coordinated with Weed and Seed activities. The partnership's link to the Steering Committee is essential here, as the following examples illustrate:

- The Weed and Seed goal of rehabilitating a public housing garden apartment complex might be linked with the police department's community policing goal of opening a storefront office in the area.
- The public housing authority may want to verify and correct the names on its tenant leases. This may require a door-to-door survey of the units, which could be executed in conjunction with community policing officers' door-to-door survey to identify community characteristics.
- The community policing door-to-door survey, although intended primarily for law enforcement and police-related problem-solving purposes, could be amended to include questions about social services (e.g., need for job training, employment, counseling) and school systems (e.g., dropouts in need of special education).

Early community policing efforts to build trust and work with the community on crime prevention goals and objectives should be coordinated with traditional enforcement such as sweeps and the execution of search warrants. All efforts

should involve cooperation. Police initiatives conducted without input from residents could create hostility toward the police. If not developed in collaboration with the community, these enforcement efforts could undermine the credibility of the community policing effort.

Step 7: Monitor and Assess Success

The final step in the implementation process is to monitor and assess the results of the community policing implementation. This is an important role for the Steering Committee, which collects the information to determine whether community policing has been successful.

The Steering Committee should be in constant contact with residents, continually taking the pulse of the community in terms of working with the police to implement community policing. Steering Committee members should attend neighborhood community policing meetings and read newsletters and other information developed to promote community policing. City and tribal management often will conduct formal community surveys to assess local satisfaction with the police department. If a city or other jurisdiction is using such a survey, the Weed and Seed Steering Committee can ask for a specialized survey for Weed and Seed sites.

The Steering Committee can use various techniques to monitor and assess community policing implementation. The assessment process should be continuous and provide feedback so that changes can be made and community policing activities can be fine-tuned.

Implementation Issues

A police agency must deal with several important issues when planning for and implementing community policing, including changing police culture and values, organizing the department to facilitate community policing, and managing the implementation.

Changing Police Philosophy and Culture

Community policing is a departmentwide effort that requires long-term, substantial changes in the entire police agency and its relationships with the public and other government institutions. It is desirable, although not mandatory, that a Weed and Seed effort be supported by such an undertaking.

Nevertheless, Weed and Seed does not require a top-to-bottom change in the culture of policing for community policing to be successful. A dedicated group of officers can develop community partnerships and implement problem solving in Weed and Seed sites; however, this approach requires that all policing activity in the area be coordinated with these officers. For example, the Weed and Seed effort may be put at risk if another police unit begins a crackdown without consulting with the assigned community policing officers. Equally important, community policing officers engaged in Weed and Seed activities must be able to call on other specialized police units to support community engagement and problem-solving activities. These units include narcotics, gangs, crime analysis, intelligence, crime prevention, investigations, communications, and special weapons and tactics, and school resource officers.

Strong leadership is needed from the chief of police, commander of field operations, and head of the community policing unit assigned to the selected areas to coordinate these activities. Community policing officers are expected to exercise initiative in dealing with residents, coordinating with other police units, and collaborating with other agencies.

Changing Patrol Officer Behavior

The most visible police presence in some communities is the patrol officer. If community policing is to succeed at the local level, the behavior of patrol officers must conform to community policing principles. Officers must



focus on local problems and must include the community in this effort. Officers should understand how to identify and analyze problems, and they must have the skills to engage the community throughout the problem-solving process.

Officers who do not possess these skills can be trained; the most important criterion for the officers is that they have an interest in being part of the effort. Officers who have been working in the designated areas should be considered for the program first because they already know the people and the problems.

The best way to change patrol officer behavior to a community policing style is to have officers work on problems in the designated site. This introduces them to the community and eventually makes them aware that problems can be solved only through collaboration with residents, businesses, government agencies, and others who are affected by the problems.

Officers working in the Weed and Seed communities get to know the residents as human beings with needs, problems, and goals. In a patrol operation in which officers rotate frequently through different shifts and neighborhood beats, officers rarely get to know anyone but the perpetrators and victims of crime. They also often develop a mindset that “bad” neighborhoods are places to get into and out of as quickly as possible. Without getting to know the

residents, officers identify all people in the community as part of the problem. Thus, for community policing to succeed, agencies need to empower patrol officers and assign them long term to the Weed and Seed sites. In this way, officers and residents can develop trust and mutual respect.

Neighborhood-Level Accountability

One major difference between traditional policing and community policing is the shift in organizational focus from accountability for a limited period (work shift) to full-time accountability for a geographic location. Traditionally, patrol officers and supervisors are held accountable for what occurs during their watch. Because officers on a shift may be assigned to police the entire city or large districts within the city, they are not held specifically accountable for local problems that occur during each shift. Moreover, persistent problems often overlap the shift times that officers work. Consequently, many unresolved problems are passed on from shift to shift, which makes it more difficult to hold officers or supervisors accountable.

Under community policing in Weed and Seed strategy, patrol officers and supervisors have primary responsibility for a designated area. The officers are held accountable for any and all police-related problems that occur in the community, regardless of when they occur. Geographic assignment integrity (the same officers are assigned to the same areas for a long period) and territorial responsibility (local officers are accountable for what goes on in the area) are crucial to the success of community policing.

To demonstrate the agency's commitment to the community and ensure that officers have assignment integrity with geographic responsibility, many police agencies have opened ministations or storefronts in the selected Weed and Seed areas. A renovated mobile home, which was

placed in the center of the community near the recreation center and park, served as one department's ministation.

Organizational Changes To Enable Community Policing

If community policing officers are to be held accountable for the designated area, they must be given adequate resources to do the job. Police agencies must decide whether to deliver patrol services to the Weed and Seed areas by using regular beat officers or creating a special squad. Regardless of the approach selected, full-service patrol officers should be assigned to the neighborhoods. In addition to their community engagement activities, the officers should handle citizen calls for service.

Policing Weed and Seed areas requires the help of specialized units such as narcotics, traffic, canine, and investigations. Which services should be provided by the community policing team and which should be provided by outside specialists must be determined locally. Decisions on decentralization of police services to the local level should involve both the police and the community.

Regardless of the degree of decentralization, Weed and Seed area officers should know about other police activity on their beat and have some input into that activity. This principle should also apply to the relationship between



the neighborhood community policing officers and the enforcement and suppression component of Weed and Seed. Once community policing efforts are in place, the enforcement and suppression task force should notify community policing officers of any undercover operations as long as such notification will not jeopardize the safety of the undercover officers or the security of the operation. Whereas the enforcement task force must be concerned with information leaks about its operations, the community policing officers can provide valuable inside information about local criminal activity.

Role of Management and Supervisors

The role of management and supervisors is critical during any organizational change, but especially in the transition to community policing. Management's most important role is to provide an environment in which community policing can be successfully implemented. One of the best ways to accomplish this is by developing a plan that explains what must be done and identifies who is responsible for each task.

Leadership and vision at the top levels of the police department are critical; the top command must demonstrate to the entire department that it is behind the move to community policing. This is especially important as the agency struggles with critical decisions such as the extent of decentralization needed for the transition to community policing. Police agencies attempting to implement community policing usually face some resistance.

Management must also lead the effort to develop the necessary officer selection criteria, training requirements, and performance evaluations to support and reinforce community policing. Management should provide the resources that the community policing officers need to do an effective job. In addition, management's help is needed to coordinate with other city and county agencies in bringing services such as code

enforcement and sanitation to the designated sites.

Field supervisors play a critical role in bringing community policing to Weed and Seed areas. Some of the functions of first-line supervisors include—

- Meeting regularly with residents to get feedback on policing plans and activities that affect their community.
- Helping community policing officers involve residents in efforts to bring about a safer community.
- Promoting and prioritizing problem-solving activities.
- Monitoring and rewarding proactive community policing, especially neighborhood problem identification and analysis.
- Preventing problems between community policing officers and residents, including corruption or unnecessary use of force.
- Facilitating interaction among officers, community members, and government agencies that can help resolve problems.

During community policing implementation, police managers serve as the planners and directors, whereas field supervisors serve as the neighborhood coaches and monitors.

Information Management

Another significant organizational issue in community policing is managing information to support implementation. A vast amount of information about Weed and Seed sites needs to be collected, stored, retrieved, and analyzed. This information should be made readily available to community policing officers.

All crimes have three important elements: offender(s), victim(s), and place. Community

policing information must describe all three. Crime analysis should identify the most active offenders, people who have repeatedly been victims, and individuals who are at the highest risk of becoming victims. This analysis must also identify places that have a disproportionately high level of crime, drug dealing, or gang activity. This information can be used to spot problems and focus police and community activities on those problems, design appropriate solutions to problems, and assess the effectiveness of interventions. Important sources of information used by community policing officers are calls for service (computer-aided dispatch [CAD] records), field incident reports, field interrogation stop reports, and officer intelligence reports. In addition, valuable intelligence from outside the police department may come from parole and probation departments, social service agencies, at-risk businesses (e.g., banks, convenience stores, and motels), property management firms, schools, and hospitals.

Neighborhood residents are another important source of information. They can express their public safety concerns at neighborhood meetings, during door-to-door surveys, on the street to foot patrol officers, and in other encounters. Community policing officers can use these



opportunities to document residents' problems. They can also collect information from residents through anonymous drug or crime tip-lines or the Internet. Increasing numbers of police agencies have Web sites through which citizens can file reports or complaints or e-mail questions and issues to the department. One police agency distributed postcards that residents could mail back with information about crime and other neighborhood problems.

In addition, community policing officers should maintain a problem-solving log that documents neighborhood problems and police officer activities directed at solving them. This log is needed for supervisors to track and monitor the progress of officers in dealing with community problems. Agencies with data processing capabilities may be able to automate this log.

Other agencies, such as code compliance and parks and recreation, also receive citizen complaints about local problems. Community policing officers should coordinate with these agencies and the Weed and Seed Steering Committee to share information.

Specialized units throughout the police agency also maintain information databases (e.g., narcotics, intelligence, gangs). Community policing officers should continuously share information about the neighborhood with these units.

In summary, community policing is an important component of Weed and Seed. To be implemented successfully, community policing requires training and technical assistance. Although the training should primarily cover the delivery of services in the Weed and Seed sites, jurisdictions that have Weed and Seed sites also could use outside training to develop plans to implement community policing departmentwide.