

**Best Practices in Police-Community Relations in
Two Cities with Large Populations**

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POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS: BEST PRACTICES

In the wake of many national tragedies, police forces around the country have been working to improve their relationship with the community that they serve. Without the trust of the community, it is difficult for the police to do their jobs effectively and even more difficult to foster relationships with the community.

The Center for Public Safety Initiative's Community Views on Criminal Justice project aims to keep "the pulse" of the Rochester community's perspectives on procedural justice. The project tracks the views of different groups in the community related to police-community relations and the criminal justice system. This paper is part of series on the Community Views of Criminal Justice project, and builds on the working paper *RPD's Efforts to Strengthen Community Relations* (Smith et al, 2016).

This paper reviews best practices for strong police-community relations in two large cities, Chicago and Houston. The police department websites for the four U.S. cities with large populations over 2 million people (New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston) were reviewed. The two cities featured in this paper were chosen due to the innovation of their initiatives, in addition to the size of the city, and accessibility of the information (program information posted to police department websites). This paper highlights programs that are working well to bring police departments closer to the communities they serve.

Chicago, Illinois

Chicago has been implementing a program called The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) since 1993. This program contains many elements including monthly beat meetings, community meetings, an education effort, and rapid response units, just to name a few. The city of Chicago has a CAPS Implementation Office which handles the coordination of city services (related to CAPS), assists with beat and district projects, and works to sustain

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participation in regular community meetings, among other duties. This implementation office is primarily staffed by civilian community outreach workers who work alongside city attorneys and police officers. A large component of this program is the city and resident partnerships; without these partnerships, the program would not work. Along with these initiatives, Chicago has invested in new information systems and crime analysis technology to assist with planning and management in the districts.

According to the most recent evaluation, public opinion of the police gradually improved between 1993 and 1999, before leveling off in the 2000s. The most improved area since the introduction of the CAPS program has been the percentage of residents who see police dealing with community concerns and working with residents to form solutions, both of which fall in line with the major goals of the program. A few of the initiatives run under CAPS are explained in more detail below. These initiatives were chosen based on the uniqueness of the initiatives and accessibility of the information available on the department's website.

Beat Meetings

Through the CAPS program, Chicago holds beat meetings regularly in all 279 beats (the territory that each officer patrols) in the city. These meetings are a place for police and community residents to meet and discuss issues happening within the beat as well as strategies to begin to combat these issues. In the most recent evaluation of CAPS, some recommendations were made to continue to improve beat meetings. For example, beat meetings should be held often and on a consistent basis, as well as in a consistent location to make it easier for residents to participate. Additionally, when residents attend the meetings they should be able to receive information about what is being done to combat concerns in their neighborhoods. The Chicago Police see these meetings as a place for residents to safely and openly express their concerns, but

recent evaluations show that some residents are apprehensive about involvement due to retaliation from other community members. The evaluation did not explain how the department plans to combat that issue.

Landlord Training

Landlords and what were described by residents as “bad” properties were among the highest concerns of residents at beat meetings in the past. Due to these concerns, a landlord training program was implemented under CAPS in 1997. There are monthly trainings in multiple areas of the city. Landlords and building managers learn about laws related to owning and renting properties as well as procedures for screening and selecting tenants. Also presented at these trainings are tips on dealing with difficult tenants. The CAPS implementation office also works with landlords to help with evicting tenants and finding new ones.

Rapid Response Officers

Rapid Response Officers handle emergency calls in their particular sectors. Having Rapid Response Officers allows patrol or “beat officers” to work with the community, maintain a strong police presence, and work on prevention instead of running around the city responding to emergencies.

Houston, Texas

Deaf Services

Houston is the only city in this brief review of national programs that has an initiative to bridge the gap between deaf citizens and hearing officers. The Houston Police Department offers video remote interpreting which allows an interpreter to be present through a webcam enabled device. This service is offered at about 20 locations, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The

technology is intended to help individuals who are deaf to feel more comfortable with requesting police assistance or filing a report.

Mental Health Learning Site

All Houston police officers go through some level of crisis intervention training. With further training, some officers become part of the Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT). CIRT pairs a crisis intervention trained police officer with a licensed mental health professional for response to the more critical mental health calls received by the department.

The Houston Police Department has been named as one of six mental health learning sites in the United States by the National Institute of Justice¹. These learning sites are meant to act as examples for other police departments and agencies who want to improve their responses to mental health calls. They are also able to provide guidance and support to others on how to start, improve, and/or expand their specialized programs.

Homeless Outreach Team

The Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) was started in Houston in 2011. The outreach team includes a sergeant, two officers, and one licensed mental health professional. This team primarily works with individuals that are homeless to help with housing, identification, employment, bus fares, as well as medical and mental health treatments. Steve Wick, the outreach team sergeant, recently explained his job as: “After slipping through the cracks of society, they [the homeless] become invisible to the system. We help shepherd them back through the system, so they can get the services they need, and get off the streets.” The team builds relationships with people they frequently encounter and are thereby able to increase the impact of the program.

¹ The other five sites are located in Los Angeles (CA), Madison (WI), Portland (ME), Salt Lake City (UT), and at the University of Florida.

Discussion

Of the four cities reviewed, Chicago and Houston's initiatives to bridge gaps between the police department and the community are extensive. The initiatives outlined above are just a few of the many programs both cities have in place. Programs similar to those in Chicago and Houston were difficult to find in cities with similar populations, which makes these initiatives unique. In the two other cities reviewed, information on police-community relations programs was difficult to locate on their main websites, and information provided was limited. In both New York City and Los Angeles, some information was found on programs aiming to work with minority groups such as immigrants and the LGBT community. However, specifics about these programs were not explained. It is possible that the larger size of both New York (8.4 million, 2013) and Los Angeles (3.8 million, 2013) play a role in the ability of their police departments to organize programs similar to the ones in Chicago and Houston. Police departments should make information on initiatives that strengthen police-community relations public.

Conclusion

In the wake of many tragedies across the nation, a division between police departments and communities across America have become prevalent. While some of the initiatives described in this review have been running for many years, the programs implemented by these two cities show a desire to unite communities and police departments in their cities. Police departments in other cities across America should consider similar initiatives to help mend ties between their communities and officers. A future paper will review best practices in cities closer in size to Rochester, New York. Initiatives which aim to be inclusive of many different types of people (e.g. Houston's deaf services and homeless outreach team) should be recognized by other departments as a way to bring their community closer together.

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