# COPS INNOVATIONS

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Problem - Solving Partnerships:
Including the Community for a Change.

"Problem-solving without partnerships risks overlooking the most pressing community concerns. Thus, the partnership between police and the communities they service is essential for implementing a successful program in community policing."

Chief Darrel Stephens, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, 2001
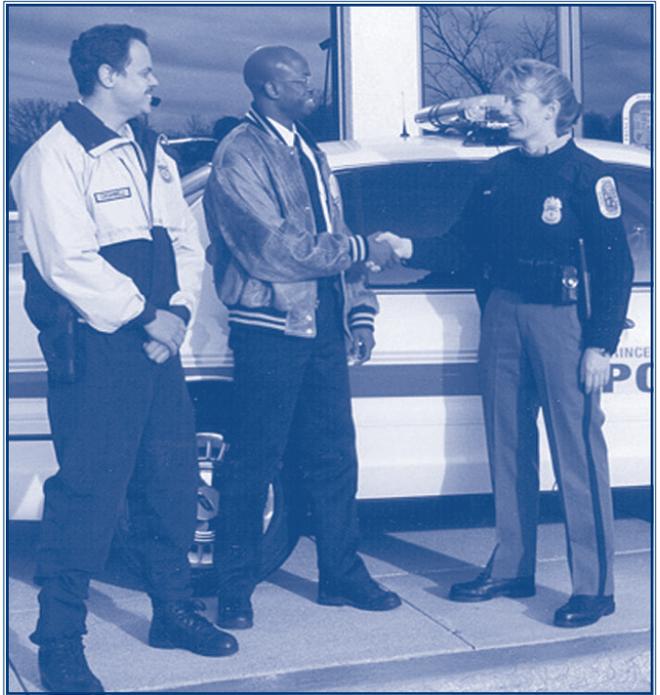
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Problem - Solving Partnerships

In 1997, the COPS Office launched its Problem-Solving Partnerships (PSP) grant program, and in doing so, sought to address a multitude of issues:

- recurrent crimes and persistent disorder problems threatening the quality of life necessary for strong communities;
- police and communities working in isolation, frustrated by traditional responses to crime and disorder problems, but lacking the collaborative strength to develop more innovative responses;
- communities being virtually excluded from planning the very crime prevention programs designed to help them; and
- reactive policing producing short-lived results.

The PSP program was designed to help police agencies solve recurrent crime and disorder problems by helping them form community partnerships and engage in problem-solving activities. The COPS Office awarded grants to 468 police agencies. Each agency was required to select a community partner and use problem-solving strategies to address a specific crime or disorder problem in a specific target area.

Police agencies submitted project plans that targeted a variety of crimes and disorder problems:

- alcohol-related problems, such as driving while intoxicated, public drinking, underage drinking,
- crimes against persons, such as non-sexual assault, domestic violence, homicide, rape/sexual assault, robbery,
- crimes against property, such as commercial and residential burglary, larceny, theft from/of auto, fraud, vandalism,
- drug-related crimes, such as street-level drug dealing, drug-related robberies and theft, and
- quality of life issues, such as residential disputes, loitering, disorderly conduct, prostitution, and panhandling/vagrancy.

The COPS Office required agencies to use a problem-solving strategy based on the SARA model: Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment. Agencies were to: a) identify and prioritize a specific problem by scanning through multiple data sources; b) conduct a thorough analysis of the problem; c) formulate a response to the problem based on the analysis results; and d) assess the impact of the response on the problem.

The Problem-Solving Partnerships National Evaluation

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) was funded by the COPS Office (under award#98-CK-WX-K001), to conduct a national evaluation of the PSP program and determine its impact by examining the way in which problem-solving strategies were implemented. In its evaluation, PERF examined the problem-solving projects of 447 PSP grantees by administering two surveys designed to capture agency activity and progress at each stage in the SARA model. Analysis was performed on the data collected from the two PERF surveys, grantee final reports, and two COPS-administered reports.

Overall Recommendations

The PSP National Evaluation produced several overall recommendations to agencies wishing to conduct a problem-solving project:

1) SELECT A WELL-DEFINED, MANAGEABLE PROBLEM. Selecting a problem that is too broad can result in an unwieldy project. Be flexible enough to return to the scanning phase, if needed. For instance, data analysis led some agencies to change their problem-type after they discovered the existence of underlying problems (e.g., robbery problem was actually caused by a street-level drug problem).

2) ESTABLISH A TARGET AREA TO FIT THE PROBLEM. Before establishing the parameters of the target area, consider the problem-type to be addressed. Selecting a target area that is too large for the problem-type can hinder analysis. Conversely, selecting too narrow an area can mask underlying causes of the problem. PERF evaluators found a significant relationship between the size of their target area and the problem that agencies selected. Those agencies selecting alcohol-related crimes and crimes against persons tended to target entire jurisdictions, while agencies selecting quality of life issues narrowed their target to a single location.

3) INCORPORATE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN ALL PHASES OF THE PROJECT. Select community partner organizations on the basis of their prior experience with the problem and involve them early in the project. Specify the roles of the police and the partners before the project begins, in writing if possible.

4) CONDUCT A THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE DATA PRIOR TO SELECTING A RESPONSE. Identifying specific factors that may be causing the problem will increase the likelihood of developing an effective response. Integrating data from several sources (e.g., social service agency data, housing data, and police records) can help ensure a thorough analysis.

5) USE THE ANALYSIS FINDINGS TO DEVELOP A RESPONSE. Letting the analysis shape the response will result in a more effective strategy for addressing crime and disorder problems. Implementing a pre-determined response or developing strategies without thoroughly analyzing the data can impede the development of alternative, non-traditional responses and may not impact the targeted problem.

6) ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE RESPONSE. How effective was the response? Will it need additional resources for the desired effect to be sustained? Did it have any unintentional effects? For example, some agencies found that an increase in the number of incidents was actually due to an increase in citizen's willingness to report the problem to the police.

7) PROVIDE PROBLEM-SOLVING TRAINING TO SWORN AND NON-SWORN PERSONNEL EARLY IN THE PROJECT. Prior to project implementation, it is critical that problem-solving training be provided to sworn officers, crime analysts and community partners, particularly on the subjects of community mobilization and overcoming data access and conversion issues. Refresher courses are equally beneficial.

8) GARNER SUPPORT FROM COMMAND-LEVEL STAFF PRIOR TO INITIATING A PROBLEM-SOLVING PROJECT. The command staff must be willing to commit officer time to all phases of the project.

Recurring Challenges: Analysis and Partnerships

PERF evaluators found that two of the most crucial steps to the problem-solving process were also two of the most consistently overlooked:

- conducting a thorough analysis and,
- selecting the right community-based partner.

Many agencies were able to identify these challenges and take measures to ensure their projects' success. Several examples are featured in the following discussion.

Analysis

"Most importantly, plan to spend the bulk of your time on the analysis phase, which will give a much more detailed picture of the problem. Many times, a thorough analysis will yield surprising findings about the underlying causes of the problem. Often, preconceived ideas about appropriate responses will thus be changed or even abandoned for better ones."

Chula Vista Police Department,
PERF Response/Assessment Survey, 1999: 12

Recommendations for conducting an effective analysis include the following:

1) GIVE IT TIME. Agencies devoted between 6 - 12 months for the analysis phase alone. In addition, sworn personnel assigned to the project spent an average of 21 hours per week on analysis, while civilian departmental personnel spent an average of 25 hours per week.

2) UTILIZE THE CRIME TRIANGLE. Examine data from all circumstances of the crime triangle including offender motivation, victim harm, and environmental conditions.

3) CAPITALIZE ON NON-TRADITIONAL DATA SOURCES. In addition to analyzing traditional data such as calls for service and arrest data, utilize data from non-traditional sources such as residential, business, and environmental surveys, victim and offender interviews, mapping/GIS data, and social service agency data.

4) EMPLOY NON-SWORN PERSONNEL TO COLLECT AND ANALYZE DATA, but be sure to include sworn personnel in the process, in order to produce an informed response.

"Agencies that could not afford to commit officer resources to the analysis knew less about the problem when it came time to develop responses."

Anne C. Grant, PERF, PSP National Evaluation Final Report, 2000: 58.

AUTO THEFT. *Glendale Police Department, Arizona* used calls for service data, incident data, and victim surveys to analyze the causes of their auto theft problem and specify the target location. Analyzing data spanning eight months, they were able to narrow their project scope from five target areas to two. They found that 51% of the vehicles were stolen from one apartment complex's parking lot between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. This analysis led to the development of an aggressive and comprehensive response which included

utilizing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design surveys (CPTED) and mobilizing community members, local businesses, and property managers. Auto thefts in the apartment complex dropped from 73 thefts in 1997 to 20 in the first half of 1999.

RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY. Chula Vista Police Department, California conducted 251 victim interviews and reviewed 1,082 incident reports of both completed and attempted burglaries of detached single-family homes. Using a 14-month data baseline, they spent 6 months analyzing characteristics of "successful" burglaries versus "unsuccessful" burglaries, examining characteristics such as victim and offender demographics, point of entry, and day/time data. This analysis enabled them to develop a victimization profile, including homeowner behaviors and home characteristics. They found 65% percent of the forced entries were committed from the side or back of a house, not easily visible from the street. 70% of completed burglaries occurred between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays. Victim surveys indicated that solid fencing or thick shrubbery may have made these homes attractive to burglars, as would single pane windows, sliding glass doors with weak or non-existent latches or locks, or doors without deadbolt locks.

> "Compared with homes where burglars tried but were unable to gain entry, burglarized homes had consistently fewer deterrents in almost every category we examined, including window locks and deadbolt locks."
>
> Chula Vista Police Department,
> Final Report, 1999: 2

> "We've learned that the key to a precisely-targeted intervention is an exhaustive examination and measurement of all known and suspected causes of the problem during the analysis phase. We now know that our findings from such an analysis will essentially guide our choice of appropriate responses and facilitate measurement of outcomes."
>
> Chula Vista Police Department
> PERF Response/Assessment Survey, 1999: 12

These findings prompted the development of a burglary prevention program, for which a Letter of Agreement was drawn between the Chula Vista Police Department and primary housing development companies to ensure that all future housing construction met forced entry door and window standards. It also ensured that housing development companies would work with the police to develop crime prevention brochures for new homeowners.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. Martinsburg Police Department, West Virginia partnered with other criminal justice and social service agencies. They collected information from a variety of sources such as victim and offender demographics, number of protective orders sought, number of criminal complaints filed, and characteristics of victims served by a women's center. One finding of their analysis was that officers often had insufficient information at their disposal to help them on the scenes of domestic violence incidents. This was partly because they did not have a consolidated source of victim and offender data. Officers had no way of knowing if there was an active protection order against the suspect, whether there was a history of abuse, or whether the suspect possessed firearms. This lack of information resulted in fewer arrests, lenient criminal charges, and less successful prosecutions. Analysis of court data revealed that 80% of all domestic violence charges were dismissed in court, and that the small number of convictions resulted in lenient sentences.

This finding led to the development of a Domestic Violence Follow-Up Program and form, which included a list of objective criteria to help officers determine when to make

follow-up calls to domestic violence victims. If an incident met certain criteria, the officer would inform the victim and suspect of a possible follow-up call within the next seven days, with a potential second visit in 21 days. Use of this form facilitated more comprehensive data collection and record keeping. In addition, emphasis was placed on improving the communication and training of various agencies involved in addressing domestic violence, with the hope that it would improve cooperation from victims in case processing, and increase the number of charges leading to prosecution and conviction. Police reports showed that officers conducted a first follow-up in 58% of the domestic violence cases and 13% had second follow-ups. *The percentage of cases dismissed decreased by 17% and offender convictions increased by 10%.*

Police - Community Partnerships and Collaborations

> "Since the number of participants who can join a partnership is infinite, so are the options we can devise to prevent crime."
>
> Moscow Police Department
> PERF Response/Assessment Survey, 1999: 12

Of the four most common reasons agencies deemed their projects to be "successful," collaboration emerged as a major component. Increased community involvement and awareness and the collaboration between police and partner organizations were seen as indicators of program success. In fact, the evaluation results showed that this collaboration component of the grant was highly valued by agencies regardless of whether the project was successful.

Community collaboration with the police took a variety of forms, from helping police in the scanning phase to prioritize problems, to gathering data and providing feedback, to assisting in community-based responses. More than 80 percent of the agencies included their community partners in conducting surveys and convening meetings and focus groups. The responsibility for addressing crime became the joint responsibility of the police and the community, and the response reflected the community's involvement.

RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES. *Leawood Police Department, Kansas* formed partnerships with homeowner associations, after analysis revealed that residential burglaries were being committed repeatedly in the same neighborhoods. Officers were then assigned as liaisons between the police department and five targeted neighborhood areas that had been victimized at a higher ratio compared to other city neighborhoods. Patrol officers convened neighborhood meetings, during which they presented citizens with crime data relevant to their neighborhood and recruited citizens to establish a Neighborhood Watch. Each resident neighborhood block captain would then help officers register families into a Neighborhood Alert Telephone System (NATS). The NATS computerized phone system was utilized to provide citizens with updated crime statistics and prevention tips by phone. *This response resulted in a 43% drop in residential burglaries in the targeted neighborhoods.*

> "...Leawood Police Department earned the trust of the community. The public has an extraordinarily high level of confidence in the police to allocate scarce resources wisely and to address community concerns conscientiously. The police actively involve the community through citizen advisors and neighborhood-based law enforcement efforts. The dividends of such efforts include a safer community,

harmonious relations between residents and the police and a shared sense of partnership in solving problems."

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Leawood Police Department
PERF Response/Assessment Survey, 1999: 22
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STREET-LEVEL DRUG DEALING. *Murfreesboro Police Department, Tennessee* found that 40% of drug arrests occurred on a particular street. Traditional responses such as patrols and arrests had not impacted the problem. The Chief of Police and Deputy Chief petitioned the planning commission for a temporary street closure. They received overwhelming community support for taking this action. *Calls for service relating to drug sales were reduced by 45%. Sixty five percent of residents reported no major problems in their neighborhood, as compared to 44% a year earlier.*

The agency recommended:

- Identify stakeholders early and develop a positive relationship.
- Conduct regular meetings and place emphasis on listening and communication.

"Many officers involved in such projects fail to realize that in many cases stakeholders had to live with these problems for long periods of time and feel police have not addressed their issues. A lot of venting from stakeholders and residents will occur; don't get discouraged, stay the course and speak frankly."

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Murfreesboro Police Department
PERF Response/Assessment Survey, 1999: 12
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LARCENY. *Moscow Police Department, Idaho* found that developing a partnership with the surrounding business community was key to effectively analyzing their larceny problem and to developing an effective response. For instance, a survey of business owners revealed that although 50% of the merchants had been a victim of crime, merchants were generally skeptical about the criminal justice system's ability to address these crimes. Accordingly, many business owners would not pursue criminal prosecution of larceny incidents.

The Moscow Police Department, in conjunction with the Moscow Chamber of Commerce, used this new information to develop a comprehensive response that addressed business owners' hesitancy to prosecute offenders. They sought to develop a sense of trust in the criminal justice system within the business community. The response included the formation of a Business Watch Program, dissemination of theft prevention educational materials, and hiring a Crime Prevention Specialist to conduct business security analyses. The Crime Prevention Specialist essentially became a liaison between the business community and the police department, working with the merchants in the target area to decrease their risk of being victimized. *Merchants' satisfaction with the police increased, as did their sense of security and willingness to report crime.*

"In many cases, merchants viewed the crime prevention specialist as playing an integral role in improving the relationship between the business community and the Moscow Police Department. A sense of partnership was established and has remained intact. The merchants are supportive of the Moscow Police Department's continued efforts toward crime prevention in their businesses."

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Moscow Police Department
PERF Response/Assessment Survey, 1999: 11
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Focus on Innovative Responses with Long-Term Effects

The PSP grant program was intended to produce long-term changes in the way police departments solved problems. Findings from the PSP Evaluation revealed that agencies designed their projects to have lasting impact beyond the end of the PSP project.

CRIME IN PARKS. *Livermore Police Department, California* reviewed calls for service data and five year's worth of field interrogation cards and police reports. Their analysis allowed them to narrow their crime problem from nine area parks to one. By establishing a partnership with area schools and the parks and recreation department, they developed a Park Watch program, designed to decrease undesirable activity in city parks. The agency plans to continue and further expand the Park Watch program.

STREET-LEVEL DRUG DEALING. *Murfreesboro Police Department, Tennessee* found the results of their problem-solving project to be so effective, they are looking towards other issues where they can apply the same technique:

> "All traditional methods of addressing the area's [drug] problems had met with negative results. A simple street closure has done what all-traditional methods could not and in the process we gained allies as well as support from arearesidents in the continuing fight against drugs and violent crimes…We are currently applying problem-solving techniques to street lighting and graffiti problems in these areas…By building on positive relationships and interaction with residents and stakeholders, we are finding that the quality of life is improving in some of our most problem areas. These efforts are creating a cooperative environment where police and residents are establishing safer neighborhoods with more opportunities."
>
> Murfreesboro Police Department
> PERF Response/Assessment Survey, 1999: 14

Additional Resources

Information on the Police Executive Research Forum can be found at www.policeforum.org.

Additional problem-solving resources are available at COPS Online at www.cops.usdoj.gov and the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing at www.popcenter.org.

To obtain details on COPS Office programs, call the COPS Office Response Center at 800.421.6770.

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