

Entry Name: Measuring the Effectiveness of Community Policing

Entry ID: 628

Population Served: 19,674

Executive Overview

Columbia Heights is a first-ring suburb to Minneapolis. It has a population of 19,674 with just over 16% of the population at or below the poverty level. The city is significantly more diverse than the state as a whole, with 69% of the population identifying as white. Black or African American made up the next largest block at 13.5%, with Hispanic or Latino at 11.9%. The city shares many of the challenges and benefits of neighboring Minneapolis.

Columbia Heights has previously documented success in the approach to Community Oriented Policing employed by the agency. The comprehensive nature of the COP philosophy, and the agency-wide implementation, has been key in being able to leverage a new policing approach into a sustained and ongoing crime reduction.

While already having met with success, we recognized there was still room to improve and grow our efforts in community policing. At the core of our expanded efforts was an officer-centric method of creating a strategic plan, and a quantitative and qualitative method of measuring the effectiveness of community policing through a series of surveys.

The involvement of line-level staff in the creation of the annual strategic plan has increased buy-in and effectiveness and led to innovative ideas for community programs designed to focus the resources where the problems are occurring. Crime is at the lowest point in 40 years, and juvenile arrests have lowered over 50% in 4 years.

In addition, a comprehensive series of surveys with employees, partners and the community has allowed us to quantitatively measure the community response to our efforts. These results were very positive, and supported our premise that effective community policing is a key in creating and maintaining good community relationships.

Framework Questions

The City of Columbia has been in a constant state of change for several decades. In the 2000 Census, the population was approximately 18,500, the city was predominately white or Caucasian at 87%, and the median per capita income was \$21,368. By the 2010 census, the population had grown by 1,000 in an area that was already considered fully developed. Caucasians now make up a smaller percentage of the population at 69% and economics continue to be an issue. The local school district reports that more than 70% of the elementary school students receive free or reduced priced lunches and over 40 distinct languages are spoken by families in the district. A drive down Central Ave provides evidence of the diversity and character of this urban city.

What these details represented for the police department was a need to change and adapt. It was

recognized that the traditional policing model of rapid-response to in-progress crime was outdated and ineffective. The police department had made various attempts at community policing programs over the years, but they often centered on an individual effort, or they were not fully supported by the department. The high crimes per capita in the early and mid-2000s were evidence of the losing battle that was being fought by the police, and the ineffectiveness of their current programs.

In 2008, the police department made an organizational change under newly appointed Chief Scott Nadeau. The change was multi-faceted in approach and focused on changing the policing response from one of reaction, to proactively solving crime and preventing it from occurring.

The initial progression to a community policing agency began with the identification of a core mission to seek pro-active partnerships in the community in order to protect life and property, innovatively solve problems and enhance the quality of life in the communities we serve. This mission was developed through the input and support of front line officers who were working the issues first hand. This mission was then crafted into a comprehensive strategic plan which outlined specific actions steps needed to form active partnerships with the community.

Many programs and initiatives resulted from the implementation of this comprehensive strategic plan. One of the first steps involved in counteracting the criminal problem was to apply problem solving strategies to ongoing issues within the city. This included the use of S.A.R.A. (Scan, Analyze, Respond, and Assess) model analysis of emerging problems and leveraging department resources and partnerships to solve them. These resources included a dedicated team of officers to address livability issues, partnerships with the Metro-Gang Strike Force, the Anoka County Sheriff's Office and the Anoka Hennepin Drug and Violent Crime Task Force. These efforts were targeted at the worst of the offenders and were designed to provide the officers assigned to patrol with some "breathing room" and the ability to work with the community. The initial effect of improving community safety was also an important step in establishing credibility with the residents.

This early success with problem-oriented enforcement was immediately followed and supported with a myriad of community policing efforts designed to capitalize on the Peelian concept of the police being the people, and the people being the police. A Community Oriented Policing Coordinator position was established as a means of facilitating the renewed entry into community policing efforts. This was a full-time sworn officer position that was tasked with the coordination and organization of many of the community policing efforts.

Under these new initiatives, programs like Neighborhood Watch were renewed and revitalized. The COP Coordinator organized the main program, while trained officers were each assigned a sector of the city to manage and work with. This was a key component in getting the community on-board with addressing criminal activity and livability offenses in the city and in the neighborhoods.

Youth outreach was begun with the implementation of a Cops-N-Kids program in which police were interacting with community at several functions to include school gatherings, open gyms and police department hosted basketball tournaments. Many of these functions were geared

towards at-risk youth.

One example is the police department initiated a Big Brothers Big Sisters program in one of the local elementary schools to provide needed mentoring to at-risk kids in the school district. This pilot version of the program was very successful as measured by the improved behavior and performance of these kids in the schools. In response, this program was expanded beyond officers and now includes civilian police department employees and responsible members of the community. This has been a great example of community policing expanding beyond just the normal avenues and combining the entire community in the effort to solve a problem.

The police department partnered with other city departments to work with the very prominent rental-housing community. A count of the landlords in the city showed there were nearly 980 owners of single and multi-unit rental properties, which make up nearly 40% of the housing stock in the city. A number of these locations were also the source of high volumes of police calls and ordinance violations. Other involved departments included Community Development, Public Works, and the Fire Department as we worked collectively to ensure compliance with required codes, proactively address ongoing problems and provide training. Regular training geared towards landlords was implemented as a way to provide tools on how to be a better manage tenants and their properties.

Initiative Questions

Community policing is everyone's job. Starting from this premise, the Columbia Heights police department implemented a series of organizational strategies that were designed to leverage the entire police department, and more importantly the community, in solving problems that were affecting livability and safety in the city. Lowered crime, better community relations and improved partnerships were viewed as measures of success.

Early in the department progression from the responsive call-taker to engaged problem-solver, many of the solutions were crafted and implemented by administration, front line supervisors and key personnel like the Community Policing Coordinator. This was a needed approach when changing the organizational culture in an established institution like a police department. This top-driven approach allowed new concepts to be introduced and was a way to demonstrate success with new methods. At the same time, police administration recognized this was not a sustainable model for long term effectiveness. The emphasis was placed on progressing to a bottom-up approach in deciding strategies that would be used to continue the expansion of the community policing philosophy.

In receiving the 2012 IACP Community Policing Award, it was a good time to reflect on the success of the program, while at the same time looking for new directions in which we could grow. This natural progression led to the recognition of the importance that each individual member of the department brings to the effort. With this in mind, 2013 marked the year the formation and setting of the strategic plan was progressed from an administrator function, to a first-line supervisor (Sergeant) function.

Officers from each work group met with their co-workers to determine the needs and issues that

they observed as part of their duties. These included representatives from patrol, investigations and school resource officers. Civilian staff was represented as well. Following these sessions with their co-workers, the representatives attended a retreat in which they worked to update and craft the strategic plan for 2014. This proved effective in eliciting new ideas that included converting a previous enforcement geared event into a community picnic designed to bring resources and services to a neighborhood in need.

This marked a critical progression in our community policing philosophy. Starting in 2008, the police department was able to make use of a combination of targeted enforcement efforts and stakeholder collaboration to make an impact on crime and improve safety. Many traditional tactics, to include saturation patrols and hot spot policing, have been shown to be effective at reducing crime and problems in the targeted area. It was also recognized that they have an ancillary cost that is paid by law-abiding members of the community when they receive additional police attention or notice as a result of these types of efforts. While it is certainly a good way to have an impact on crime reductions, an important part of community policing, it can also have an adverse effect on community relationships as a whole.

Having this in mind, the Columbia Heights Police Department worked to narrow our focus when dealing with problem issues. Our previous efforts would include neighborhood or geographical saturations and zero-tolerance policing. The new method, which the strategic plan identified as a daily review of hotspots, persons and crimes by type through internal and external reports, led to a more focused approach to problem solving. Rather than targeting a city block, the police department would focus in on the few individuals causing the issue and utilize an appropriate solution to solve the problem. Officers working these areas were the best resource for determining the problem and also working on solutions. Officers made use of weekly crime numbers and S.A.R.A. model analysis to determine the root cause of the problem, and direct the response there.

These focused efforts led to improved collaboration with police department partners that often included Community Development, Public Works, Anoka County Social Services and Anoka County Mental Health among others. It was further recognized that hand-cuffs (arrests) are only occasionally the best solution to a given problem. On the contrary, the solutions that involved things like coaching a property owner on how to be a better landlord, or leveraging an ordinance that prohibited disorderly activities on a private property, were more effective in the long run than an arrest for a simple violation.

Mental health is another example of an area in which the police department recognized they could better serve the community through improved training and understanding of crisis intervention. The police department then partnered with the Barbara Schneider Foundation and Metropolitan State University to provide mandatory training to all officers. This extensive training included an online portion in addition to role-play scenarios with professional actors. This training was followed up with additional training specific to war veterans in crisis. The department viewed both these trainings as equally, if not more important, than core skills like use of force or firearms. The goal was to better serve the community by creating tools that helped officers avoid things like use of force and firearms.

In addition to providing better tools to help officers when responding to calls for service, the police department continued to recognize the importance of creating opportunities to interact with the community outside the experience of calling the police for help. The police department learned of and adopted a program called Coffee with a Cop. With this program, the police department held monthly sessions, advertised through social media and local signage, at area businesses in which the community and the police could interact in an open forum. These forums became great outlets to learn about issues and concerns pressing for many of the community residents. By rotating these meetings to various locations around the city we were able to interact with more of the community residents.

At the same time, we recognized that many of the people we wanted to speak with the most were not in attendance at the meetings. These were the residents representing some of our hardest hit neighborhoods and many of our minority communities. In response, officers that were participating in our strategic planning sessions formed an idea to bring out forum to the residents rather than have them from to us. The idea was dubbed an Eat and Greet and featured partnerships with several area businesses, other city departments, the school district and Anoka County.

The concept behind the Eat and Greet was to have a community forum in an area where our impact was needed most. Usually we hold picnics and gatherings at city parks, which were not conveniently located in this area. As a replacement, the officers identified a few adjacent lots that were owned by the city. Area businesses help to provide food and city departments to include the recreation department and public works attended. Many area residents attended and shared their ideas and concerns while learning about various services and having a positive interaction with the police.

The response to this event was positive, and the feedback from those in attendance was helpful and meaningful. While a single event like this will not replace the daily requirements for effective community policing, it certainly was a great way to jump start the relationships and great opportunities for further dialogue.

In keeping with this idea, the police department examined other neighborhoods in the city where further outreach and community interaction was needed. The police department identified a neighborhood that was experiencing a high volume of police calls and criminal activity. The area was economically poor with predominately minority families to include east African immigrants. It was also situated in a geographical area that was not well represented by police department outreach efforts. In response, the police department conducted a focused survey in this particular neighborhood. We then used the responses to begin planning work in an effort to expand the existing park area and install a multi-purpose community building. In a partnership with Community Development and Public Works, planning has begun to create a community building that can be used to bring resources closer to those in need. The police department intends to staff the building at regular intervals once it is complete, as a way of creating further interactions with this segment of our community. In addition, the area has seen a recent influx of Somali immigrants and was the location of a recent federal arrest for supporting terrorism, which creates an opportunity for the police department and the city to expand services and outreach efforts to meet this growing need and mitigate further issues.

Initiative Evaluation

The police department was able to record many positive changes following the implementation of the strategic changes starting in 2008. These changes included lower calls for service and lower reports of crime. By 2014, the police department had recorded the lowest overall crime rate in over 30 years, and juvenile arrests from 2008 to 2014 were down over 50%. In many cases, these alone would have been great measures of success for any program or initiative. At the same time, the police department recognized that these were only part of the story and we continued to look for methods in which we could evaluate our overall effectiveness.

Since community policing, meaning a true connection to the community, was at the core of what we were trying to accomplish, the police department mandated a minimum of 10 hours of community police outreach efforts per employee per year. This included civilian staff in addition to sworn officers and featured a myriad of different programs. This COP centric work performed by officers included traditional programs like DARE, as well as open gyms, anti-bullying reading programs in schools, Big Brothers-Big Sisters, Coffee with a Cop, National Night Out, Teen Academy, presentations at the Adult Basic Education center, Community Picnics, Charity events for the local food shelf (SACA), and gatherings and forums at various religious organizations to include churches and mosques. Employees were not limited to existing programs either. A Senior Academy was created when an officer felt there was a segment of the community that could use additional outreach. All of these hours were recorded using an online program with 1,560 hours recorded for 2014.

The creation of the Senior Academy program is a great example of the empowered role each individual is now playing in the Columbia Heights Police Department. Each officer and employee is taking ownership of the mission and is looking for opportunities to improve in the service we provide. While the Senior Academy showed an example of a program creation to serve a need, the Teen Academy provides a good example of a critical eye turned on an existing program. The Teen Academy had been created by a team of officers as an idea to improve relationships with high-school age youth and have an open dialogue about policing. After a successful initial run, the attendance in the program dropped and the cost was beginning to outweigh the benefit. The officers recognized this issue and placed the program on hold while they worked to determine what changes needed to be made to restore the connection with the students.

By 2013, the police department Community Policing efforts were in full swing and it seemed there were numerous indicators we could point to that supported the success of the efforts. Crime was at a three-decade low, juvenile arrests were down, and the police department had been recognized with both the IACP Community Policing Award in 2012 and the ISD 13 School District's Above and Beyond award in 2013. It would have been easy to declare "mission accomplished" and continue on with the status quo, but instead the department recognized there was still an opportunity to learn more from the community and make improvements.

As Sir Robert Peel noted in his timeless principles on policing, the police are just those paid to do full time that which is incumbent upon all of us. To ensure that we were truly effective at community policing we needed to poll the community and our key stakeholders. To this end, a

large scale research project, to include a scientifically validated survey, was begun in the summer of 2014 in an effort to measure how well we were doing.

The survey was conducted in four parts and included all police department employees, all city employees, community stakeholders, and a sampling of residents from the community. The police and city employees were surveyed via an anonymous paper survey. The community stakeholders were surveyed using an electronic survey that was distributed via email. For the community survey, a local college intern assisted with going door to door and surveying the residents on a variety of questions pertaining to community policing and police perception in general. Almost 300 residents were surveyed with a margin of error of +/- 5%.

The results of the survey were very positive. In examining the employee and stakeholder surveys they indicated progression and growth in the area of community policing. Those having worked with the police department and in the community listed positive comments about the department that included increased professionalism and improved communication. 76% of the community partners surveyed felt their partnership with the police department led to a reduction in crime. 72% of our partners felt the collaborative relationship was working to solve their problems. The responses from the residents themselves were even more positive with over 94% of those surveyed indicating they feel safe from crime in the neighborhood. 99% felt the police would act on their problem when they called.

What the police department took away from the surveys and research project was that we were moving in the right direction. While the responses were very positive, there were still lessons to be learned from the data. How we communicate is a great example. Social media has become nearly ubiquitous in modern culture and has entered mainstream policing full force. However, only 4% of those surveyed indicated they liked to receive communication from the police department via social media. Rather, 69% indicated their preferred method was flyers. This information has strong implications regarding the way in which we communicate with the public.

Lessons Learned

One of the lessons we learned from the surveys is there is always room to grow and improve. The comments from police employees were positive, and it was obvious that they were seeing the results of the work they were doing. At the same time, there were still variations in how each officer viewed community policing. This led to a mandatory in-service training in which the tenets and practices of community policing were reviewed. Specific consideration was given to the goals and objectives outlined by officers in the annual strategic plan. Among those goals and objectives listed is, reformatting current programs, initiating new programs and addressing the needs of the changing multicultural community. Additional training was held that focused on cultural competency and ways in which officers and employees can better understand and communicate with residents from different backgrounds. We believe this focus and awareness created an open and hospitable work environment which put us in a position to hire two east-African police officers at the end of 2014.

Sir Robert Peel wrote back in 1829, “The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon the public approval of police actions.” The relevance of this statement rings

even more true in the modern day climate of anti-police protests and calls for reform. It is important to note that the Columbia Heights Police Department conducted the community survey just after events occurred in Ferguson, MO. Despite the timing and national sentiment at the time, the survey results came back strongly positive.

We believe this is a direct result of the investment the police department has made in the community on many levels that include youth, citizen interaction and stakeholder partnership. When done correctly, community policing builds the relationships between the community and the police that help to bridge the challenging times, and resolve issues through open dialogue and shared understanding. When combined with the strong reduction in reported crime, and a 50% reduction in juvenile arrests, it is hard to argue against the benefits of community policing.

In addition, we firmly believe that we would not have been nearly as successful if community policing was only the job of one or two key people in the organization. Making community policing everyone's responsibility increased the amount of time that was dedicated to it, improved the community and police interactions, and allowed for those in the best position to evaluate and understand community problems to be empowered to solve them.

Perception versus reality continues to be a problem for police departments nationwide, and ours is no exception. For example, we know for a fact that crime is down in record numbers in Columbia Heights. Yet only 41% of the public agreed with this statement when surveyed. This is a great reminder that perceptions can be equally as important as the reality of a situation. We believe the solution for this is continued dialogue with the community and partner organizations. Chief of Police Scott Nadeau is a sitting member on the boards of both the Lee Carlson Center for Mental Health and Well Being, and the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the Twin Cities, so as to continue this dialogue and sharing of information.

Our biggest lesson learned is one of continued investment in the community. It is not enough to expect that we will be able to work our way out of a problem with enforcement alone. In what we would consider one of Robert Peel's most important principles, he noted that it is the absence of crime, not the visible evidence of police activity that is a true measure of police effectiveness. With this in mind, we will continue on our focus of crime prevention through Community Oriented Policing.