

# Community & Problem-Oriented Policing Discussion Guide

## INTRODUCTION

The Cleveland Division of Police (CDP) is developing a new Community and Problem-Oriented Policing Plan. To help guide that process, CDP, the City—including the District Policing Committees and the Community Relations Board, —the Cleveland Community Police Commission, and the Federal Monitoring Team are gathering input from Cleveland residents about what the plan should include.

This discussion guide provides an overview of the key components of community policing.

The guide is divided into three parts:

1. Community and Problem-Oriented Policing
2. Recruitment and Officer Training
3. Staffing and Officer Evaluation

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## PART I: COMMUNITY AND PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING

Community and problem-oriented policing—which we will refer to simply as “community policing”—involves the police and the community working together to promote public safety and neighborhood well being. The idea behind community policing is that the police and the community share responsibility for public safety, and that each has an important role to play.

There are three main parts to community and problem-oriented policing:

- A. Collaborative Problem Solving
- B. Community Input on Policing Practices And Policies
- C. Opportunities for Officers to Get to Know the Community

The following sections describe each of these parts and include questions about each.

### COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

A key part of community policing is “problem-oriented policing” or collaborative problem-solving.

The idea behind problem-oriented policing is that public safety issues sometimes reflect underlying community problems—like housing shortages, abandoned vehicles, empty lots, or poor street lighting. Often it is better to address these problems directly.

#### Community Partners

Community partners play an important role in problem-oriented policing. They can help the CDP identify and prioritize community problems. They also can help the CDP identify the best ways to solve problems in their neighborhoods.

The CDP can identify partners through formal groups, such as the District Policing Committees (DPC) (formerly called District Community Relations Committee). Each police district already has its own District Policing Committee, which has monthly public meetings to discuss policing issues or crime and safety concerns. The District Commander often identifies district problems by attending these meetings.

The CDP also can reach out directly to groups of residents, local businesses, non-profit organizations, community and faith-based leaders, and other government agencies.

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A community policing plan should include regular opportunities for community members to provide input on policing policies and practices. Doing so helps to ensure that the police act in ways that reflect what the community expects. It also builds trust between the community and police.

For this reason, the Consent Decree created the Cleveland Community Police Commission (CPC) to represent community voices and interests, and make recommendations on CDP policies and practices. The Commission has 13 members that represent various groups and communities. The Commission holds monthly public community meetings.

In addition to working closely with the CPC, the CDP also can get input directly from residents about its policies and practices.

Three important questions about community engagement are:

1. What policies and policing practices should residents be able to provide input on?
2. How can the CDP and CPC make sure that they hear from all of Cleveland's many communities?
3. What are ways to make sure the input is appropriately considered?

### Deciding When to Get Community Input

The CDP's manual has policies on everything from officer uniforms to the use of force. The CDP updates its policies on a regular basis, and sometimes changes are quite minor. Due to time and resource limits, it might be difficult for the CDP to gather public input every time it makes a change. On what sorts of policies should the CDP seek community input? Should the CDP get input from the community before adopting a new technology, like body-worn cameras? What about if the CDP wants to make changes to its recruitment practices?

### Ensuring Broad Participation

Both the CDP and CPC will need to make sure that they hear from all of Cleveland's many communities. They can get input in a number of ways:

- Online questionnaires and surveys: Online surveys make it easy for people with Internet access to give input. A person can take a questionnaire from their home or office. On the other hand, taking an online survey is an individual activity. There is no opportunity to interact with others, bounce ideas around, or learn more. It is also hard for people without Internet access to participate.
- Attending a Cleveland city-wide forum or small district event: In-person gatherings give people an opportunity to talk with one another, and with policing officials. People can ask questions, and learn more about the issue before giving input. On the other hand, planning such events takes a lot of time. And community members must give up their free time (usually on weekday evenings or weekends) to attend.

- Attending a CPC or DPC meeting: These organizations already have formal relationships with the CDP. The CDP does not need to organize a separate meeting to collect feedback. But again, community members will need to give up their evenings or weekends to attend.

## Acknowledging and Responding to Community Input

A police department will not always be able to do everything that the community asks. And community members may not always agree on what the department's policies should be. But police officials can still show that they have taken community input seriously by responding to the input they receive and explaining their decisions. Departments can do this through social media, follow up presentations, or even a press release.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICE OFFICERS TO GET TO KNOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS

A community policing plan should include opportunities for officers to get to know community members and become familiar with local problems and concerns. Doing so helps build trust between officers and community members and encourages collaborative problem-solving.

**Alternatives to motorized patrol**, such as bicycle or foot patrols, or mini-stations are some ways for the CDP to encourage regular contact between officers and community residents. Three approaches the CDP could take are:

- Foot patrols put officers into direct contact with the community. Officers can stop by neighborhood businesses, introduce themselves to residents, or simply stop to have a friendly conversation. Community members often report that officers are more approachable when on foot. On the other hand, an officer can only cover a very small area when patrolling on foot—often just a few blocks, or a stretch of a busy commercial street. This means it can take officers longer to respond when people call the police. District 2 currently uses foot patrols.
- Bicycle patrols were used in Cleveland during the Republican National Convention this past summer. Many residents enjoyed seeing officers on bikes and officers found that residents were much more willing to talk with them. Bike patrols can cover a much larger area than foot patrols—and can more easily and quickly respond to a call for service when additional units are needed. Still, using bike patrols can result in slower response times. District 4 has bike patrols.
- Mini-stations are neighborhood police centers set up in storefronts or in dedicated trailers. Residents can visit officers to share community concerns, file complaints, and simply just chat. Unlike bike patrols and foot patrols, officers are located in a mini-station rather than on the street. This means community members must come to officers, instead of the other way around. The CDP used to have a number of mini-stations, but closed them in 2005 because of concerns about costs. A mini-station requires that the CDP put 2-3 officers there throughout the day. These officers would not be available to respond when people call the police.

**Opportunities for social engagement**, such as Athletic Leagues, “Coffee with a Cop,” and participation in community events are another way for officers to get to know their communities. Officers also participate in a variety of parades, special events, and block parties throughout the community. In developing its plan the CDP will need to decide what sorts of events to prioritize, and which officers to send to the events.

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## Various Kinds of Community Events

The CDP hosts a number of programs and events throughout the year for community members of all ages.

The main cost to many of these programs is officer time. Attending the events takes officers away from their regular patrol duties. The CDP can either use overtime (which of course costs the City money), or put fewer officers out on patrol, which can lead to slower response times.

Many officers have said that they really enjoy the large annual events (like Halloween, or Easter Egg Hunts) because these attract community members who do not typically attend other police-sponsored activities. This allows officers to connect with new faces and get to know more people in the community. However, such events take a lot of time to plan.

Officers also say they enjoy going to schools and reading to children. These activities take less effort to plan, but may not reach as many people.

## Officers Attending Social Events

In some police departments, special “community policing” officers attend most programs and events. In others, regular patrol officers participate. Sometimes, command officers, like the Chief or District Commander, attend police community events.

- Some argue that it is better for *specialized community policing officers* to attend, because they may be better trained to interact with community members. Their attendance at such events also wouldn't take away from response times for emergencies or other calls for service.
- Others think it is better for residents to see the *same officers who patrol their neighborhoods* at community events, because then patrol officers and community members can get to know and trust each other.
- Some see *command staff participation* as a signal that department leadership is committed to the community.

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## RECRUITING

Successful community policing requires departments to recruit and hire officers who are service-minded and committed to working closely with residents to promote public safety. Important traits include problem-solving skills, emotional maturity, good communication skills, and openness to new experiences. The Cleveland Division of Police is working to develop a new recruiting plan to recruit officers who represent all of Cleveland’s many communities. Cleveland Police Chief Calvin Williams recently announced the division “is seeking young, energetic, intelligent and compassionate people to join” the division.

Departments use a variety of creative strategies to recruit service-oriented candidates. Some focus on advertising—through flyers and recruiting fairs—in locations where they are likely to find individuals with strong communication skills and service-oriented personalities. This could include schools, social service providers, and even restaurants. Others work with community groups and local businesses to get the word out and suggest outreach strategies.

## OFFICER TRAINING

Officers should be familiar with the history, traditions, demographics, and quality-of-life challenges of the various communities they work in. Many departments provide what is called “cultural competency” training to teach officers about local communities and traditions. This kind of training can reduce the chance of biased policing by building stronger ties between officers and minority communities. It also can help officers to be sensitive to different communities’ needs. For example, in San Diego, which has a growing Muslim population, officers were trained on how to properly search a woman wearing a hijab, a headscarf worn by some Muslim women.

Cultural competency training also can reduce the risk of misunderstandings in police-citizen encounters. In Seattle, for example, officers who worked in a predominantly Latino district were taught that it is custom in some Latin American countries for a person being pulled over during a traffic stop to exit their vehicle and walk over to the officer. Knowing what to expect helped officers respond in these situations in a calmer and safer manner.

## STAFFING

Effective community policing requires officers to devote a lot of time and effort to building bonds with community members and solving problems. At the same time, they must still respond to calls for service. In order to allow more time for officers to engage in community policing, some departments use civilians to do certain jobs that would otherwise be done by officers.

Civilian employees or unsworn officers cost less to train, equip, and pay, and can replace sworn officers in non-policing assignments so that officers can spend more time on the street. In some police departments, civilians or unsworn officers assist with dispatch, record keeping, and parking enforcement. In others they respond to traffic incidents and take the first statements, help preserve crime scenes, and help officers investigate minor quality-of-life offenses.

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CDP also has the Auxiliary Officer Program for interested citizens. Auxiliary officers are trained, unpaid volunteers who help the police and community by assisting the CDP with securing the scenes of downed power lines or flooded roads, handling vehicle tows, attending special events, and performing other activities that enable officers to respond to higher priority assignments.

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## OFFICER AND DEPARTMENT EVALUATION

It is well known that “what you measure is what you get.” Departments that embrace community policing need some way of knowing whether individual officers are spending time getting to know residents and addressing their concerns. Departments also need some way of knowing whether the overall community policing plan is working and is consistent with what the community wants.

### Officer Evaluation

If officers are evaluated based on their number of arrests or citations, then that is what they will focus on. As departments move towards community policing, they often find ways to give incentives to officers and supervisors to focus on building positive community relationships as well. Some departments track an officer’s progress in identifying neighborhood problems, soliciting community input, and crafting solutions to those problems. Other departments track community partnerships an officer develops by measuring the officer’s meaningful outreach and contacts with community members.

### Department Evaluation

Once the CDP adopts a new Community and Problem-Oriented Policing Plan it will need to know how well the plan is working. The Consent Decree requires the Cleveland Community Police Commission (CPC) to come up with an assessment plan to evaluate the CDP’s community policing and engagement efforts.

### Three important questions about this community assessment plan are:

1. How should the CPC measure what community members think about the community policing plan?
2. Who should inform the CPC about whether the community policing plan is working?
3. What factors should the CPC consider and keep track of?

### Measuring What Community Members Think

The assessment plan should include opportunities for feedback from ordinary residents about how well the Division is doing. This can be done through a variety of approaches.

- Some methods—such as online surveys—allow as many people as possible to provide feedback. In some departments, officers hand out comment cards after each interaction with a resident.
- Focus groups are another approach to finding out what community members think. Although not every community member would be able to participate, a focus group could include a diverse group of residents who could represent the larger Cleveland population.

### Groups Informing the CPC

Any community policing evaluation should capture the full range of community views on the community policing plan. Some individuals may not have the time to provide the CPC with input on how well the CDP is doing in its community policing efforts. For this reason, the CPC will need to talk to a broad range of groups

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and organizations—from church groups to local businesses. The key question is whom should the CPC look to in order to determine whether the plan is working and is consistent with what the Cleveland community wants?

### **Factors the CPC and the CDP Should Consider and Keep Track Of**

There are many ways to measure how well the CDP is carrying out the community policing plan. As the CPC develops its assessment plan, it needs to determine what activities are worth keeping track of. These activities should reflect what community members expect of officers and of the Division as a whole. Some ideas include: the number of events and activities that officers participate in, the number of community group meetings that officers attend, successful efforts to solve specific community problems, and positive interactions with residents.