Public safety is the first job of government. It is essential to economic advancement and community wellbeing. Policing agencies cannot do their work without community support. Yet, as many have noted in recent years, there is a lack of trust and legitimacy around policing in some communities—often in challenged communities that need effective policing the most.

The Policing Project at New York University School of Law is a non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening policing by bringing the ordinary processes of democratic accountability to bear. In particular, we work to ensure that the community's voice, and sound decisionmaking techniques, are part of policing.

"Back End" vs. "Front End" Accountability

At the Policing Project, we distinguish between two forms of government accountability: front-end and back-end.

Front end accountability is familiar throughout government. It has four elements. (1) There are rules and policies in place before officials act. (2) These rules and policies are transparent, meaning the public is able to find out what they are. (3) There are opportunities for the public to provide input before the rules and policies go into effect. (4) And to the extent possible there is an effort to ensure that the rules and policies do more good than harm, often through some technique like cost-benefit analysis. Front-end accountability is often absent around policing.

Instead, much of the focus on policing accountability today is on the back end, after things have gone wrong. The attention is on identifying *mis*-conduct rather than specifying in the first place what is appropriate conduct. Familiar forms of back-end accountability include civilian review boards, inspectors general, judicial review, and even body cameras.

In a well-functioning system, front-end and back-end accountability work together. Front-end accountability enables the public to participate in decisions about policing—from stop-and-frisk to body-cameras to location tracking devices—and sets out the policies that police departments will use. Back-end accountability helps to ensure that those policies are followed, and ideally, also indicates where revisions on the front end are necessary.

Our mission is to empower the public voice on policing on the front end— for policing agencies and communities to work collaboratively to identify public safety priorities and to decide, together, how the community should be policed. The Policing Project is working with police departments and communities across the country to foster this sort of front-end engagement, all with the goal of promoting sound and effective public safety and community wellbeing.

Our Work

Our work advances each of the four key components of front-end accountability. We are developing best practices for policing; promoting transparency around policies and practices; working with police departments and communities to give the public a more active voice in how they are policed; and promoting data collection and cost-benefit analysis of policing. Our work is supported generously by both governments and private funding, including individuals and foundations.

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Crafting Best Practices for Policing.

We write best practice and policies for policing agencies. The Director of the Policing Project, Barry Friedman, is leading the American Law Institute's effort to draft principles to guide policymakers and departments in setting policies for policing. The project is supported by a national group of advisers including prominent advocates, law enforcement officials, community activists, lawyers, and judges. When we work with communities and policing agencies on the many projects we describe below, we often are helping to draft new, workable, transparent policies to address the challenges they face.

We also have issued a *Statement of Principles of Democratic Policing*, which has been adopted by Major City Chiefs, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), the Police Foundation, the National Association of Black Law Enforcement (NOBLE), and the National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE).

Promoting Transparency Around Policing.

We are working to make policing agencies more transparent to the communities they serve. We are developing best practices for putting police department policies and manuals online in ways that the public can use and understand. And we are working on more specific practices to further transparency. For example, we are working in partnership with the Center for Policing Equity and the California Department of Justice to produce a guidebook on best practices for collecting traffic and pedestrian stop data and analyzing that data for evidence of racial bias.

Involving the Community in Setting Policing Policy.

We are helping to ensure that communities have a real voice in how they are policed. Community involvement in setting policing policies and priorities is essential for promoting trust and legitimacy between departments and the communities they serve. But there are few models for how to bring it about. That is where we come in.

We are working on the ground in cities across the country to bring police departments and their communities together to set policies for policing. We have run city-wide community engagement processes in New York City, Los Angeles, Camden, and Cleveland, around policies on issues ranging from body-worn cameras to the use of force. In Tucson and Chicago, we are helping to set up civilian bodies that can facilitate this sort of public input on an ongoing basis. We are working to teach civilian review boards, a back-end agency, how to engage in front-end input into policing.

Our partners in these efforts include civic leaders, law enforcement agencies, grassroots community organizations, civilian oversight bodies, and advocacy groups.

In each of the places where we work we have two goals: helping departments and communities address their specific local needs, and developing models of police-community engagement that can be replicated nationwide.

In addition to these on-the-ground efforts, we also are spearheading a number of research projects to learn from existing community engagement initiatives and develop a set of best practices for departments to draw upon.

Assessing the Efficacy of Policing Practices.

We are partnering with researchers and law enforcement agencies to promote rigorous assessment of policing practices. We spend over $100 billion each year for public safety, but we know remarkably little about what works to keep us safe, and at what expense to values that can be difficult to quantify, like privacy or community trust, or disparate treatment of minorities. We are working to change that.

In partnership with the Police Foundation, we are spearheading a project to bring cost-benefit analysis to policing. Although cost-benefit analysis is used throughout government to evaluate the efficacy of various programs, it is almost entirely absent from policing. To the extent that it is used, it is focused exclusively on the budgetary impact policies or practices, ignoring entirely the social costs that policing can impose. Many of these costs are intangible—like time, or dignity costs, or community trust—and are thus hard to measure. But including them is essential if we are going to get a full picture of whether policing practices actually work.

We are working with leading methodologists to tackle some of the obstacles to doing cost-benefit analysis to policing, and we are partnering with law enforcement agencies to assess specific policies or practices that they have identified as areas of interest. ★

Join Us

This is a big job, and we welcome help. You can learn more about us on our website, www.policingproject. org. There, you also can offer your thoughts, donate, or sign up to receive our email updates. Or, you can follow us on Twitter @policingproject.