

# Community Policing Defined



**COPS**

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

# The Primary Elements of Community Policing

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Community Members/Groups

Nonprofits/Service Providers

Private Businesses

Media

Agency Management

Organizational Structure

Personnel

Information Systems (Technology)

Community Partnerships

Organizational Transformation

Problem Solving

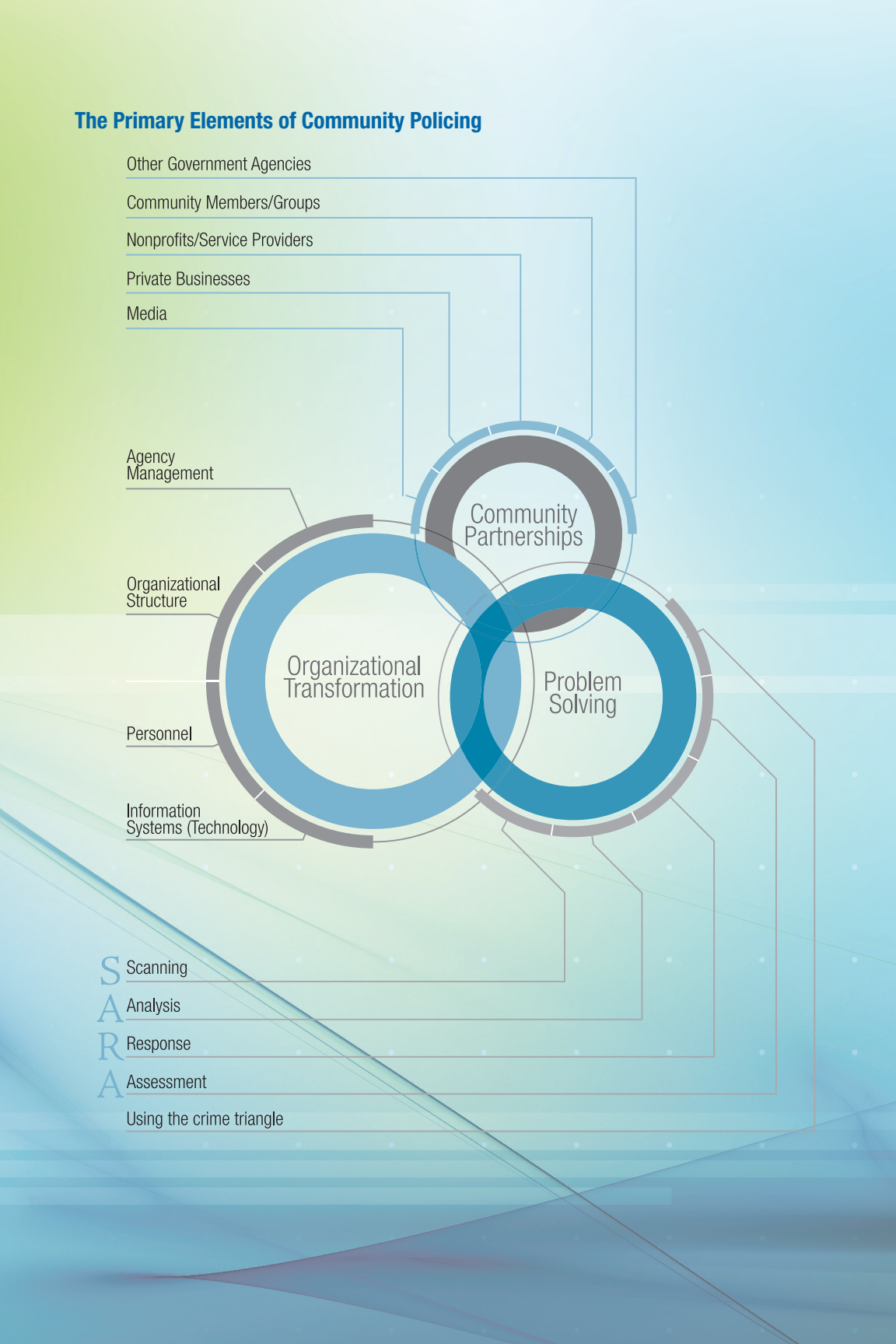
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**Community policing** is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.

## Community policing is comprised of **three** key components:

### Community Partnerships

Collaborative partnerships between the law enforcement agency and the individuals and organizations they serve to develop solutions to problems and increase trust in police.

### Organizational Transformation

The alignment of organizational management, structure, personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem solving.

### Problem Solving

The process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate effective responses.





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Community policing, recognizing that police rarely can solve public safety problems alone, encourages interactive partnerships with relevant stakeholders. The range of potential partners is large and these partnerships can be used to accomplish the two interrelated goals of developing solutions to problems through collaborative problem solving and improving public trust. The public should play a role in prioritizing and addressing public safety problems.

## Other Government Agencies

Law enforcement organizations can partner with a number of other government agencies to identify community concerns and offer alternative solutions. Examples of agencies include legislative bodies, prosecutors, probation and parole, public works departments, neighboring law enforcement agencies, health and human services, child support services, ordinance enforcement, and schools.

## Community Members/Groups

Individuals who live, work, or otherwise have an interest in the community—volunteers, activists, formal and informal community leaders, residents, visitors and tourists, and commuters—are a valuable resource for identifying community concerns. These factions of the community can be engaged in achieving specific goals at town hall meetings, neighborhood association meetings, decentralized offices/storefronts in the community, and team beat assignments.

## Nonprofits/Service Providers

Advocacy and community-based organizations that provide services to the community and advocate on its behalf can be powerful partners. These groups often work with or are composed of individuals who share common interests and can include such entities as victims groups, service clubs, support groups, issue groups, advocacy groups, community development corporations, and the faith community.

## Private Businesses

For-profit businesses also have a great stake in the health of the community and can be key partners because they often bring considerable resources to bear in addressing problems of mutual concern. Businesses can help identify problems and provide resources for responses, often including their own security technology and community outreach. The local chamber of commerce and visitor centers can also assist in disseminating information about police and business partnerships and initiatives, and crime prevention practices.

## Media

The media represent a powerful mechanism by which to communicate with the community. They can assist with publicizing community concerns and available solutions, such as services from government or community agencies or new laws or codes that will be enforced. In addition, the media can have a significant impact on public perceptions of the police, crime problems, and fear of crime.



# Organizational Transformation

**The alignment of organizational management, structure, personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem solving.**

The community policing philosophy focuses on the way that departments are organized and managed and how the infrastructure can be changed to support the philosophical shift behind community policing. It encourages the application of modern management practices to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Community policing emphasizes changes in organizational structures to institutionalize its adoption and infuse it throughout the entire department, including the way it is managed and organized, its personnel, and its technology.

## Agency Management

Under the community policing model, police management infuses community policing ideals throughout the agency by making a number of critical changes in climate and culture, leadership, formal labor relations, decentralized decision-making and accountability, strategic planning, policing and procedures, organizational evaluations, and increased transparency.

### Climate and culture

Changing the climate and culture means supporting a proactive orientation that values systematic problem solving and partnerships. Formal organizational changes should support the informal networks and communication that take place within agencies to support this orientation.

### Leadership

Leaders serve as role models for taking risks and building collaborative relationships to implement community policing and they use their position to influence and educate others about it. Leaders, therefore, must constantly emphasize and reinforce community policing's vision, values, and mission within their organization and support and articulate a commitment to community policing as the predominant way of doing business.

### Labor relations

If community policing is going to be effective, police unions and similar forms of organized labor must be a part of the process and function as partners in the adoption of the community policing philosophy. Including labor groups in agency changes can ensure support for the changes that are imperative to community policing implementation.

### Decision-making

Community policing calls for decentralization both in command structure and decision-making. Decentralized decision-making allows front-line officers to take responsibility for their role in community policing. When an officer is able to create solutions to problems and take risks, he or she ultimately feels accountable for those solutions and assumes a greater responsibility for the well-being of the community. Decentralized decision-making involves flattening the hierarchy of the agency, increasing tolerance for risk-taking in

problem-solving efforts, and allowing officers discretion in handling calls. In addition, providing sufficient authority to coordinate various resources to attack a problem and allowing officers the autonomy to establish relationships with the community will help define problems and develop possible solutions.

### **Strategic planning**

The department should have a written statement reflecting a department-wide commitment to community policing and a plan that matches operational needs to available resources and expertise. If a strategic plan is to have value, the members of the organization should be well-versed in it and be able to give examples of their efforts that support the plan. Components such as the organization's mission and values statement should be simple and communicated widely.

### **Policies**

Community policing affects the nature and development of department policies and procedures to ensure that community policing principles and practices have an effect on activities on the street. Problem solving and partnerships, therefore, should become institutionalized in policies, along with corresponding sets of procedures, where appropriate.

### **Organizational evaluations**

In addition to the typical measures of police performance (arrests, response times, tickets issued, and crime rates) community policing calls for a broadening of police outcome measures to include such things as greater community satisfaction, less fear of crime, the alleviation of problems, and improvement in quality of life. Community policing calls for a more sophisticated approach to evaluation—one that looks at how feedback information is used, not only how outcomes are measured.

### **Transparency**

Community policing involves decision-making processes that are more open than traditional policing. If the community is to be a full partner, the department needs mechanisms for readily sharing relevant information on crime and social disorder problems and police operations with the community.



## Organizational Structure

It is important that the organizational structure of the agency ensures that local patrol officers have decision-making authority and are accountable for their actions. This can be achieved through long-term assignments, the development of officers who are “generalists,” and using special units appropriately.

### Geographic assignment of officers

With community policing, there is a shift to the long-term assignment of officers to specific neighborhoods or areas. Geographic deployment plans can help enhance customer service and facilitate more contact between police and citizens, thus establishing a strong relationship and mutual accountability. Beat boundaries should correspond to neighborhood boundaries and other government services should recognize these boundaries when coordinating government public-service activities.

### Despecialization

To achieve community policing goals, officers have to be able to handle multiple responsibilities and take a team approach to collaborative problem solving and partnering with the community. Community policing encourages its adoption agency-wide, not just by special units, although there may be a need for some specialist units that are tasked with identifying and solving particularly complex problems or managing complex partnerships.

### Resources and finances

Agencies have to devote the necessary human and financial resources to support community policing to ensure that problem-solving efforts are robust and that partnerships are sustained and effective.

## Personnel

The principles of community policing need to be infused throughout the entire personnel system of an agency including recruitment, hiring, selection, and retention of all law enforcement agency staff, from sworn officers to civilians and volunteers. Personnel evaluations, supervision, and training must also be aligned with the agencies' community policing views.

## **Recruitment, hiring, and selection**

Agencies need a systematic means of incorporating community policing elements into their recruitment, selection, and hiring processes. Job descriptions should recognize community policing and problem-solving responsibilities and encourage the recruitment of officers who have a “spirit of service,” instead of only a “spirit of adventure.” A community policing agency also has to thoughtfully examine where it is seeking recruits, whom it is recruiting and hiring, and what is being tested. Agencies are also encouraged to seek community involvement in this process through the identification of competencies and participation in review boards.

## **Personnel supervision/evaluations**

Supervisors must tie performance evaluations to community policing principles and activities that are incorporated into job descriptions. Performance, reward, and promotional procedures should support sound problem-solving activities, proactive policing, community collaboration, and citizen satisfaction with police services.

## **Training**

Training at all levels—academy, field, and in-service—must support community policing principles and tactics. It also needs to encourage creative thinking, a proactive orientation, communication and analytical skills, and techniques for dealing with quality-of-life concerns and maintaining order. Officers can be trained to identify and correct conditions that could lead to crime, raise public awareness, and engage the community in finding solutions to problems. Field training officers and supervisors need to learn how to encourage problem solving and help officers learn from other problem-solving initiatives. Until community policing is institutionalized in the organization, training in its fundamental principles will need to take place regularly.

## **Information Systems (Technology)**

Community policing is information-intensive and technology plays a central role in helping to provide ready access to quality information. Accurate and timely information makes problem-solving efforts more effective and ensures that officers are informed about the crime and community conditions of

their beat. In addition, technological enhancements can greatly assist with improving two-way communication with citizens and in developing agency accountability systems and performance outcome measures.

### **Communication/access to data**

Technology provides agencies with an important forum by which to communicate externally with the public and internally with their own staff. To communicate with the public, community policing encourages agencies to develop two-way communication systems through the Internet that allow for online reports, reverse 911 and e-mail alerts, discussion forums, and feedback on interactive applications (surveys, maps), thereby creating ongoing dialogues and increasing transparency.

Technology encourages effective internal communication through memoranda, reports, newsletters, e-mail and enhanced incident reporting, dispatch functions, and communications interoperability with other entities for more efficient operations. Community policing also encourages the use of technology to develop accountability and performance measurement systems that are timely and contain accurate metrics and a broad array of measures and information.

Community policing encourages the use of technology to provide officers with ready access to timely information on crime and community characteristics within their beats, either through laptop computers in their patrol cars or through personal data devices. In addition, technology can support crime/problem analysis functions by enabling agencies to gather more detailed information about offenders, victims, crime locations, and quality-of-life concerns, and to further enhance analysis.

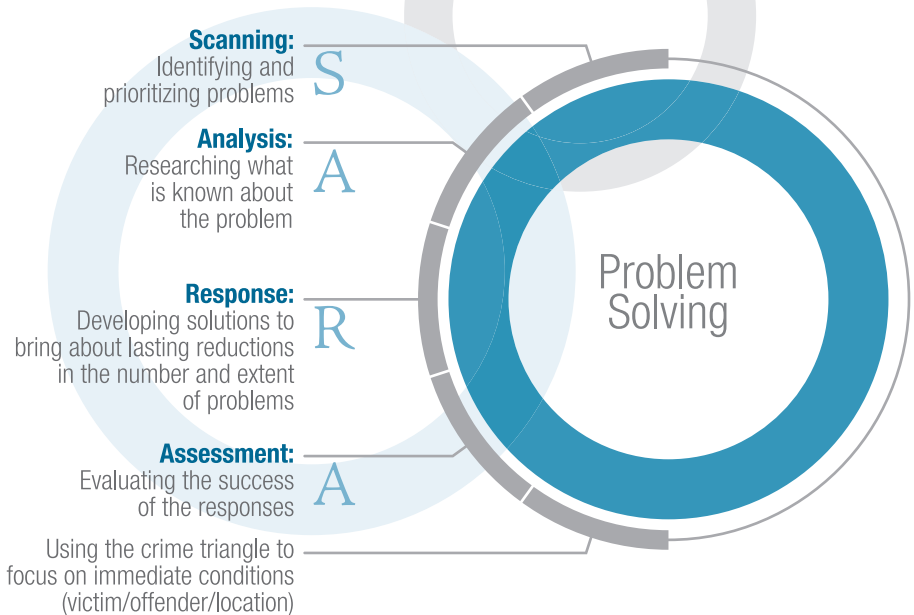
### **Quality and accuracy of data**

Information is only as good as its source and, therefore, it is not useful if it is of questionable quality and accuracy. Community policing encourages agencies to put safeguards in place to ensure that information from various sources is collected in a systematic fashion and entered into central systems that are linked to one another and checked for accuracy so that it can be used effectively for strategic planning, problem solving, and performance measurement.

# Problem Solving

**The process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate effective responses.**

Community policing emphasizes proactive problem solving in a systematic and routine fashion. Rather than responding to crime only after it occurs, community policing encourages agencies to proactively develop solutions to the immediate underlying conditions contributing to public safety problems. Problem solving must be infused into all police operations and guide decision-making efforts. Agencies are encouraged to think innovatively about their responses and view making arrests as only one of a wide array of potential responses. A major conceptual vehicle for helping officers to think about problem solving in a structured and disciplined way is the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment) problem-solving model.



**Scanning:** Identifying and prioritizing problems

The objectives of scanning are to identify a basic problem, determine the nature of that problem, determine the scope of seriousness of the problem, and establish baseline measures. An inclusive list of stakeholders for the selected problem is typically identified in this phase. A problem can be thought of as two or more incidents similar in one or more ways and that is of concern to the police and the community. Problems can be a type of behavior, a place, a person or persons, a special event or time, or a combination of any of these. The police, with input from the community, should identify and prioritize concerns.

**Analysis:** Researching what is known about the problem

Analysis is the heart of the problem-solving process. The objectives of analysis are to develop an understanding of the dynamics of the problem, develop an understanding of the limits of current responses, establish correlation, and develop an understanding of cause and effect. As part of the analysis phase, it is important to find out as much as possible about each aspect of the crime triangle by asking Who?, What?, When?, Where?, How?, Why?, and Why Not? about the victim, offender, and crime location.

**Response:** Developing solutions to bring about lasting reductions in the number and extent of problems

The response phase of the SARA model involves developing and implementing strategies to address an identified problem by searching for strategic responses that are both broad and uninhibited. The response should follow logically from the knowledge learned during the analysis and should be tailored to the specific problem. The goals of the response can range from either totally eliminating the problem, substantially reducing the problem, reducing the amount of harm caused by the problem, or improving the quality of community cohesion.

**Assessment:** Evaluating the success of the responses

Assessment attempts to determine if the response strategies were successful by understanding if the problem declined and if the response contributed to the decline. This information not only assists the current effort but also gathers data that build knowledge for the future. Strategies and programs can

be assessed for process, outcomes, or both. If the responses implemented are not effective, the information gathered during analysis should be reviewed. New information may have to be collected before new solutions can be developed and tested. The entire process should be viewed as circular rather than linear meaning that additional scanning, analysis, or responses may be required.

### Using the crime triangle to focus on immediate conditions (victim/offender/location)

To understand a problem, many problem solvers have found it useful to visualize links among the victim, offender, and location (the crime triangle) and those factors that could have an impact on them, for example, capable guardians for victims (e.g., security guards, teachers, and neighbors), handlers for offenders (e.g., parents, friends, and probation), and managers for locations (e.g., business merchants, park employees, and motel clerks). Rather than focusing primarily on addressing the root causes of a problem, the police focus on the factors that are within their reach, such as limiting criminal opportunities and access to victims, increasing guardianship, and associating risk with unwanted behavior.



Eck, John E. 2003. "Police Problems: The Complexity of Problem Theory, Research and Evaluation." In Johannes Knutsson, ed. *Problem-Oriented Policing: From Innovation to Mainstream*. Crime Prevention Studies, vol. 15. pp. 79–114. Monsey, New York: Criminal Justice Press and Devon, U.K.: Willan Publishing.

## About the COPS Office

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Rather than simply responding to crimes once they have been committed, community policing concentrates on preventing crime and eliminating the atmosphere of fear it creates. Earning the trust of the community and making those individuals stakeholders in their own safety enables law enforcement to better understand and address both the needs of the community and the factors that contribute to crime.

COPS Office resources, covering a wide breadth of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—are available, at no cost, through its online Resource Information Center at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov). This easy-to-navigate website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.





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