



# Strategic Communication Practices:

## A Toolkit for Police Executives

Darrel W. Stephens  
Julia Hill  
Sheldon Greenberg







# **Strategic Communication Practices:**

A Toolkit for Police  
Executives

Darrel W. Stephens  
Julia Hill  
Sheldon Greenberg

---

This project was supported by a Cooperative Agreement 2008-CK-WX-K008 awarded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

The Internet references cited in this publication were valid as of the original date of this publication. Given that URLs and websites are in constant flux, neither the author(s) nor the COPS Office can vouch for their current validity.

ISBN: 978-1-935676-41-6

September 2011

**CONTENTS**

**About the COPS Office** . . . . . 4

**Letter from the Director** . . . . . 5

**CHAPTER I—The Police Communication Imperative** . . . . . 7

    Communications Issues . . . . . 8

        Crime . . . . . 8

        Police Effectiveness . . . . . 9

        Public Image and Perceptions of the Police . . . . . 10

        Policing Approach . . . . . 10

        Police Misconduct . . . . . 11

        Budget—Staffing . . . . . 11

        Terrorism . . . . . 13

        Immigration . . . . . 13

        Influencing Behavior . . . . . 14

        Transparency . . . . . 15

    Essential Audiences . . . . . 15

        Elected Officials . . . . . 17

        Community Leaders . . . . . 17

        Neighborhood Leaders . . . . . 17

        Public Interest Groups . . . . . 17

        Non-English Speaking Communities . . . . . 18

        Faith Communities . . . . . 18

        Employees . . . . . 18

    Communication Strategies . . . . . 19

**CHAPTER II—Where and How People Get Information** . . . . . 21

    The Media Landscape . . . . . 22

        The Evolution of the Media in the Digital Age . . . . . 22

        How People Access, Use, and Disseminate Information . . . . . 24

        Declines in Trust and Credibility . . . . . 28

        Viewership, Readership, and Listenership . . . . . 29

        Print Media . . . . . 29

        Television . . . . . 32

        Radio . . . . . 34

        The Online Migration . . . . . 35

        Where Do We Go from Here? . . . . . 38

<b>CHAPTER III—Developing Strategic Communication Plans . . . . .</b>	<b>39</b>
A Strategic Approach . . . . .	39
STEP 1: Research and Situation Analysis . . . . .	40
STEP 2: Determining Goals and Objectives . . . . .	43
STEP 3: Target Publics . . . . .	45
STEP 4: Communication Strategies . . . . .	47
STEP 5: Messages . . . . .	48
STEP 6: Tactics and Implementation . . . . .	51
STEP 7: Evaluation and Measurement . . . . .	54
<b>CHAPTER IV—The Chief/Sheriff (CEO) Role</b>	
in Effective Communications . . . . .	57
The Communications Plan . . . . .	57
Modeling the Behavior . . . . .	59
The CEO as Communicator . . . . .	59
Crime . . . . .	60
Arrests . . . . .	60
Use of Force . . . . .	60
Death of an Officer/Serious Injury . . . . .	60
Misconduct . . . . .	61
Policy . . . . .	61
The CEO and the Communications Staff . . . . .	62
Resourcing Public Affairs . . . . .	63
<b>CHAPTER V—Communication Tools . . . . .</b>	<b>65</b>
Traditional Tools . . . . .	65
The News Media . . . . .	65
Written Release . . . . .	65
News Conference . . . . .	66
Op-Ed Pieces . . . . .	67
Newspaper Columns . . . . .	67
Radio/Television Talk Shows . . . . .	67
Responding to Requests for Information . . . . .	68
Community Presentations, Speeches, and Meetings . . . . .	68
Reports . . . . .	69
Newsletters . . . . .	71

Brochures . . . . .	72
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) . . . . .	72
Cable Television . . . . .	73
The New Tools . . . . .	74
Departmental Web Page . . . . .	75
Blogging . . . . .	77
Social Media . . . . .	78
E-Mail . . . . .	82
Wikipedia . . . . .	84
Community Notification Programs . . . . .	85
<b>CHAPTER VI—Crisis Communications: Planning and Execution . . . . .</b>	<b>87</b>
Crisis as Opportunity . . . . .	88
When Crisis Strikes: Strike First . . . . .	91
The Role of the Chief . . . . .	93
Messaging . . . . .	96
Preparing Spokespeople . . . . .	98
Target Publics . . . . .	99
Houston, We Have a Problem: Manage Issues to Prevent Crises . . . . .	100
Situational Analysis . . . . .	102
Drafting a Workable Crisis Communication Plan . . . . .	103
<b>CHAPTER VII—Conclusion: Going Forward. . . . .</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>References . . . . .</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Appendixes. . . . .</b>	<b>117</b>
Appendix A: Executive Briefing Participants—Milwaukee and Ft. Worth. . . . .	117
Appendix B: Developing the Core Message. . . . .	119
<b>About the Authors . . . . .</b>	<b>121</b>



## **About the COPS Office**

The Office Of Community Oriented Policing Services (the 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, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources. The community policing philosophy 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. In its simplest form, community policing is about building relationships and solving problems.

The COPS Office awards grants to state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime-fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies. The COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders and all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$16 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. More than 500,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.

The COPS Office has produced more than 1,000 information products—and distributed more than 2 million publications—including Problem Oriented Policing Guides, Grant Owner's Manuals, fact sheets, best practices, and curricula. And in 2010, the COPS Office participated in 45 law enforcement and public-safety conferences in 25 states in order to maximize the exposure and distribution of these knowledge products. More than 500 of those products, along with other products covering a wide area of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—are currently available, at no cost, through its online Resource Information Center at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov). More than 2 million copies have been downloaded in FY2010 alone. The easy to navigate and up to date website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.



Dear Colleagues,

At the heart of community policing and problem solving is the requirement that the police are transparent in all their dealings with the public. Transparency requires effective and timely communications—a task that is often easier said than done. Police organizations have always faced challenges communicating with both their internal and external audiences. In their 24/7 world, events happen at a rapid pace and there is a long list of people who believe they should be among the first to know what has occurred.

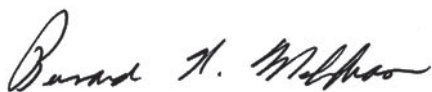
This world has become even more complicated with the dramatic changes in where, when, and how people access information. The traditional news media are no longer the primary sources of news and information, and yet police departments continue to invest most of their public information resources into media relations activities. With the evolution of social media and the intense, category-killing power of Internet news, it is enormously difficult to keep up with what is being said or shown as police situations unfold, let alone effectively use these vehicles to communicate with important internal and external audiences. To help law enforcement improve the effectiveness of their efforts to inform and engage the public and their employees, the COPS Office has invested in a partnership with the Major Cities Chiefs Association—benefiting departments who have the need for information and tools on communications planning and strategies.

*Strategic Communication Practices: A Toolkit for Police Executives* builds on the earlier COPS Office publication *Key Leadership Strategies to Enhance Communication*. Developed with invaluable input from chiefs, sheriffs, police executives, and communications personnel from departments across the United States and Canada, this Toolkit is intended to assist law enforcement executives and communications directors in navigating the shark-infested communication waters. It is designed to help police executives and communications personnel understand how the news media have changed over the past 20 years. It provides guidance on how to develop a strategic communications plan, focuses on the role of the chief and sheriff, discusses the various tools that are available, and explores the unique communication needs that crop up during times of crisis. Finally, the Toolkit outlines the process for developing a strategic communication plan to guide this critically important work.

I urge you to take a close look at your communications program and give serious consideration to creating or improving your own plan. Special thanks to all of the people (see the Appendix) who read and provided feedback on early drafts of this Toolkit and who contributed examples from their own agencies that highlight just some of the great creative and effective work being done in the law enforcement community.

I am pleased to be in a position to offer this Toolkit to you as a helpful resource in your continuing work to keep America safe.

Sincerely,



Bernard K. Melekian, Director  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services



*“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”*

*—George Bernard Shaw*

---

### CHAPTER I—The Police Communication Imperative

The avenues for communication have grown exponentially in recent years. More than 77 percent of American households use a high-speed Internet connection (IWS 2011). About 96 percent of Americans subscribe to some form of cellular telephone service (CTIA 2011) and television viewers continue to move to cable and satellite outlets. While the avenues for communication have multiplied and usage steadily increases, it has become more difficult to effectively communicate with a community segmented across the many platforms they have to obtain news and information. It is not easy for anyone to effectively connect with large segments of the public in an effort to enhance their knowledge of a subject or influence their behavior. It is especially challenging for the police because of the complexity of the issues and the diversity of their audience. It has never been more important for the police to effectively communicate with the public. Yet, law enforcement continues to wrestle with unprecedented budget reductions, which for many agencies have resulted in loss of personnel; slow or no replacement of aging technology, vehicles, or equipment; and erosions in service.

At times, the police need to be able to reach the entire community, and more frequently, a specific audience such as a neighborhood, young people, the elderly, or victims of a certain type of crime. Police must be able to communicate in different languages through methods that are most likely to connect with the audience they need to reach—all in a timely way.

**The news media have traditionally been the primary method police have used to communicate important messages to the public.** The police can hold a news conference, circulate a press release, or simply respond to newspaper, television, and radio reporters on items of interest. The news media continue to be an important method of communication, but one thing has become increasingly clear; as newspaper readers and television viewers turn to the “new media”—Internet, cable television, and social media—for information, the police need to think about the traditional media in a different way. As the traditional news media develop business models that are more profitable, it has also become clear that effectively accessing and using them is among the challenges the police must address.

**To effectively communicate with the public, the police must not only figure out how to use the traditional media more effectively, they have to understand and master all of the new and emerging communications technologies.** They also have to be much more aware of how the public obtains information and use the methods that are most likely to reach the targeted audiences.

### COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

In addition to the technical challenges, police face other communications hurdles as well. One of the most significant is the complexity of the issues they must explain to the public. Several of the most complex communications issues are discussed below to highlight the importance of developing thoughtful communication strategies.

#### CRIME

Crime has always been an important measure of police effectiveness but in the past 10 to 15 years it seems to have become the most significant. Crime has been emphasized in spite of the fact that police spend the majority of their time dealing with issues that are not directly related to crime. Policing is a multifaceted enterprise that involves handling calls for service, resolving disputes, controlling traffic, and many other activities. It does not lend itself to one measure taking precedence over all of the other things the public expects from the police. Using “crime” as the primary measure of success presents other problems as well.

The primary source of information on crime in the United States is the FBI Uniform Crime Report (UCR) that is compiled and published annually. The eight Part 1 offenses included in the report (Homicide, Forcible Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, Burglary, Larceny, Auto Theft, and Arson) are compiled from information reported from local police agencies. The UCR indicates the violent crime rate in the United States has declined from its peak in 1991 by 40 percent and the property crime rate by 38 percent (FBI 2009). Both violent and property crime registered additional declines of 6.5 percent and 3.3 percent, respectively, in 2010 (FBI 2011). Although this is indeed a positive trend, a number of issues make talking about crime reduction more complicated. They include:

- The FBI Uniform Crime Report includes only those crimes reported to the police. The most recent national victimization survey indicates that 51.8 percent of violent crime victims and 61.6 percent of property crime victims did not report the incident to the police (BJS 2010).
- Questions continue to be raised about the accuracy of the crime data reported by the police. *Time* magazine reported on the results of a survey of NYPD police captains who indicated that the pressure of CompStat<sup>1</sup> meetings caused some to falsify the numbers (Von Drehle 2010). In Dallas, Texas, the City Council hired an auditor to verify the crime statistics (Thompson 2010). A *New York Times* article raises further questions about crime data:

*Felony assaults, along with all other major crimes in the city, have sharply decreased over the last decade, according to the New York Police Department. But during much of that period, the number of assault victims taken to emergency rooms nearly doubled, according to the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.*

---

1. Compstat is an operations management and accountability model developed in the New York Transit Police in the early 1990s under the leadership of Bill Bratton. It received worldwide attention when it was credited with significant crime reductions when implemented in the NYPD by the newly appointed Commissioner Bill Bratton.

*Comparing the figures is difficult. It is unknown, for example, how many of the hospital assault reports were felonies and how many were misdemeanors, which the Police Department does not regularly report to the public. But two criminologists say the difference provides more evidence of a Police Department culture that puts so much emphasis on annual crime reductions that some police supervisors and precinct commanders may be manipulating crime statistics (Rivera 2010).*

- The Part 1 crime index does not include computer crimes, identity theft, credit card and check fraud, narcotics offenses, and a plethora of other crimes that are reported to the police or are counted because an arrest has been made.
- In spite of the decline in reported crime, surveys indicate most Americans believe crime has increased nationally (74 percent) and in the area they live (51 percent) (Jones 2009).

Crime is a far more complex phenomenon than statistics can portray. Individuals' experiences, both direct and vicarious, have a profound and distortional effect on their perceptions. Many people live in neighborhoods in which incidents of crime are rare. Others live in areas where there is a high concentration of crime and police calls for service. Their experiences with crime are very different and they are likely to have different perceptions of crime and the police. Yet common to all groups, at least to some degree, is their exposure to crime through the news and entertainment media, which tend to present inaccurate views of policing, police personnel, victimization rates, and the prevalence of violent crime.

### POLICE EFFECTIVENESS

Although crime reduction has taken center stage as a measure of police effectiveness (particularly with politicians), the police are engaged in a significant amount of work that is not directly related to crime but is important to an overall sense of safety. They spend a considerable amount of time dealing with traffic issues, handling calls for service, special events, disputes, security alarm calls, and many other non-crime problems. In Charlotte, North Carolina, where police serve a population of more than 750,000 people, about 70 percent of the calls for service are not crime calls (CMPD 2009). How do these activities fit within the overall perception of police effectiveness?

Traditional measures that have taken a back seat to reported crime include response time, traffic statistics such as collisions and enforcement, case clearances, arrests, community problem solving efforts, and overall citizen satisfaction. Where can the public find out about police performance in areas other than crime? How do the police effectively communicate about this aspect of their work? What should they be talking about?

### PUBLIC IMAGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE

Officers have thousands of interactions with residents each year—responding to calls, attending community meetings, and making traffic stops. Those experiences create lasting impressions of police performance that is shared with family and friends. If the person feels they were treated poorly and does not make a complaint, there is no opportunity to address the officer’s behavior or explain why he or she behaved in that way. In a National Institute of Justice study, Reisig and Parks (2002) found:

- A resident’s personal experience with police is nearly as important as the resident’s impression of the neighborhood and quality of life in determining his or her satisfaction with police.
- Residents who have a great sense of safety and who rate their neighborhoods favorably hold a higher opinion of police despite individual characteristics such as race and age.
- Caucasians, non-black minorities, and older residents were more satisfied with police than were blacks and younger residents (ages 18 to 32).

People with little or no personal contact with police form perceptions, as well, although they are shaped vicariously, through what they hear from friends and family and what they see in the news and entertainment media.

This is a particularly difficult communications challenge for the police, as every interaction with the public, every news story, and every account of an encounter with the police relayed to family and friends contributes to their image and community perceptions of effectiveness.

**How do they connect with the public in a way that allows them to talk generally about performance? What do the police need to do to ensure they have the opportunity to address concerns with both organizational and individual performance?**

### POLICING APPROACH

**Describing the approach an agency takes in policing the community is important because it helps residents understand their role in relation to the police.** Community policing, problem oriented policing, CompStat, and intelligence-led policing, for example, are labels for different ways of policing, but without explaining what is being done and why, people have little understanding of what these terms mean.

**How do officers on the street describe the department’s approach to policing? Is it the same as the command level? What does the community take away from these descriptions?**

If they are expected to be “partners” in the effort, what does that role entail? Is it just to call the police when they see something suspicious or have been a victim of a crime? Are they expected to be a part of crime watch? Patrol their neighborhoods?

Explaining the policing approach to the community is complicated. It is nevertheless essential that the community has some understanding of this approach, because they also play an important role in community safety and crime reduction.

## POLICE MISCONDUCT

The way police handle communication about internal misconduct has an influence on public confidence.

*The Springfield Police Department is facing a crisis in race relations and public confidence—one of its own making.*

*Rebuilding trust and confidence in the police will be difficult because of the department's secrecy during its internal investigation of the incident involving an officer with a history of brutality charges—as well as three other officers. Why did it take so long for the public to learn of the incident and why is the investigation dragging on? (Editorial 2010)*

Allegations of misconduct influence the way police officers feel about their organization.

*Officers also worry that their departments will not support them adequately if something goes wrong. Officers on the street tend to believe that managers are so preoccupied with their own careers that they will not stand behind officers in ambiguous situations, protect them if they make mistakes, or defend them adequately against false charges. These are not unrealistic concerns. (Kelling 1993)*

Police misconduct is one of those issues about which it is especially important to inform the public, but it also presents significant challenges. The occasional competing interests of the community, police department, and officers must be considered. Legal issues such as liability and the privacy of personnel information are factors that must be taken into account when faced with a misconduct situation requiring a public explanation.

The task becomes even more complicated when video, photos, and comments of all types make their way around the world on the Internet. Police authorities and government officials may find themselves looking at images of an incident on the Internet and on television news before they have had the opportunity to gather sufficient information to make a statement. People can weigh in with critiques and observations long before meaningful explanations of what occurred can be pieced together. There is a very fine line between acting too quickly with limited information that may turn out to be wrong, and waiting while the images and speculation circulate to fill the void created by police silence.

## BUDGET—STAFFING

State and local governments in the United States are facing significant declines in revenue streams that have required budget reductions—some mild, others severe. Most police services are funded through revenues negatively impacted by a poor economy, such as property and sales taxes. Police departments facing large budget reductions are forced to reduce personnel because these costs average about 85 percent of the overall police budget. **News accounts of the struggle to reduce police spending underscore both the challenge with making the cuts and letting the public know the impact.**

What should political, city/county, and police leaders say about reducing the number of officers? Should employees get information ahead of the public?

---

**Stockton, CA:** A billboard paid for by the Stockton Police Officers Association went up Saturday. It appears to be splattered with blood and reads: “Welcome to the 2nd most dangerous city in California — Stop laying off cops.” (AP 2010)

**Oakland, CA:** Councilmember Rebecca Kaplan said that when it comes to cutting police, it is important for the public to know that police are not only highly paid but also that they do not—for now—contribute to their retirement plans. All other city employees do. “We shouldn’t have to pay double what New York City has to pay,” she said. “We shouldn’t have the highest-paid workers paying a lower percentage into their pension than the lowest-paid workers.” (Rayburn 2010)

**Tulsa, OK:** The Chief of Police talked about laying off 130 officers—16 percent of the sworn officers. “There is a point,” he said, “and I don’t know where that point is yet, that we won’t be able to operate any further and expect the service levels we’ve had in the past and that the citizens have come to expect” (Barber and Lassek 2009).

What are people in Stockton, Oakland, and Tulsa to think about when they hear about staff reductions in their police departments? Should they be afraid? Officers in Stockton are telling the public that their city is the second most dangerous in the state, ostensibly because they are being laid off.

In Tulsa, residents are told that, at some point, these reductions are going to have an impact on service, but the chief offers no specifics other than a 16 percent reduction in officers. In Oakland, the public is being told their officers do not contribute to their generous pensions and cost twice the amount of New York City officers. The city is looking for concessions from the union to reduce the number of officers that have to be laid off to balance the budget.

To be sure, these are thorny issues to explain, both to employees and the public. The tension and competing interests that can develop between officers, the chief, and the political leaders further complicate the task. **Determining the appropriate timing and most effective communication vehicles for the right messages is not easy, nor will the right messages necessarily satisfy those whose financial stake in the decisions are threatened. Yet, who frames the issues first and offers the most compelling scenario may have some advantage.**

What level of detail should there be about the changes in services and the impact they believe these will have on the community? Can the community expect longer response times, less visibility, changes in the way police prioritize calls for service or work investigations? All of these questions are important to helping people to understand and assess the impact of staffing reductions. Of course, *liking or even agreeing with* the explanation or the consequences of these difficult decisions is altogether another matter.



## iWATCH—LAPD

The 21st century version of the Neighborhood Watch is “iWATCH”—a public education and reporting program developed by the Los Angeles Police Department, designed to help communities partner with law enforcement in the fight against crime and terrorism.

iWATCH engenders personal empowerment of citizens as they learn to protect against and take action when they recognize suspicious activities and behaviors.

Who should use iWATCH?

Any public safety agency looking to engage its community in the fight against general crime, or crimes committed to support terrorist activities. People are discouraged from making reports based on a person’s race, ethnic origin, or religious affiliation. Allowing the public to partner with law enforcement helps to decrease fear as people feel safer knowing there is something they can do to help keep their communities safe.

For more information about iWATCH, log on to [lapdonline/iwatchla.org](http://lapdonline/iwatchla.org).

—Mary Grady, Consultant  
Former Communications Director, LAPD

## TERRORISM

Providing information to and seeking information from the public on matters of terrorism requires an especially thoughtful approach. A 2010 Pew Research Center poll indicates that 80 percent of respondents believe terrorism should be a top priority for the president. Terrorism was third on the list, following the economy at 83 percent, and jobs at 81 percent, and well above the next priority which was social security at 66 percent (Pew Research Center 2010). Although a top priority at the federal level, local police must also cope with decreasing budgets and a public that has a wide range of service expectations beyond combating terrorism.

Keeping the public informed and finding ways to engage them is one premise of the iWATCH campaign that encourages the community and frontline employees to report suspicious behavior, activities, and circumstances.

## IMMIGRATION

**Local police are embroiled in the public debate over national immigration policy and it has become an enormous communications challenge.** Immigration enforcement authority rests solely with the Federal Government, where national policy is established. The Federal Government is responsible for dealing with all immigration issues, including deportation for violations of these laws.

In recent years both state and local governments have enacted laws and ordinances aimed at making it more difficult for illegal immigrants to live in their states and communities. These policies range from prohibiting renting housing to illegal immigrants and restricting the provision of public services to making it illegal to employ them. The policies are also designed to provide authority to local police to play a role in enforcing these laws.

Nevertheless, public opinion is greatly divided. A Pew Research Center poll reports that 32 percent of Americans believe illegal immigrants should be allowed to stay, 32 percent believe they should be given temporary status and 27 percent believe they must go home (Pew Research Center 2006). In a 2010 study, 67 percent of Americans believed the country would be better off if illegal immigrants became citizens and paid taxes while 28 percent believed they should leave the country. In the same survey, 89 percent of respondents indicated border security should be increased and there should be crackdowns on employers hiring illegal immigrants (Teixeira 2010).

This has turned out to be a divisive and difficult issue for police and local governments as well. Leaders in many urban communities argue that enforcement of immigration laws by local police cause immigrants to be reluctant to report crimes and provide information for fear it will lead to deportation. This, they say, leads to “open season” on anyone believed to be an illegal immigrant. At the same time, the public has great difficulty understanding why local police cannot enforce federal immigration law.

There are many obstacles in dealing with illegal immigration issues at the local level. Overcoming language and cultural barriers, explaining the complex immigration laws and the limits to local police authority, and balancing the provision of police services to immigrants without being perceived as supporting illegal immigration are all issues that require an especially thoughtful approach.

### INFLUENCING BEHAVIOR

Research in the United Kingdom and the United States has clearly established that many victims suffer repeat victimizations. These repeat victims account for a substantial amount of reported crime. For example, consider these estimates of repeat offenses based on an international crime survey (Weisel 2005):

<b>Sexual assault</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Assault</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Robbery</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Theft from vehicle</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Vehicle theft</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Burglary</b>	<b>17%</b>

In addition, many instances of crime that are single victimizations could have been prevented had the victim taken simple steps to reduce the opportunity for the offender to commit the crime. In 32 percent of the burglaries in the United States, entry was gained through unlocked or open doors (FBI 2009). In a sizeable number of auto thefts, the keys are left in the vehicle—many in the ignition with the car running. Thefts from vehicles often involve unlocked cars and in many cases valuables are left in plain sight. Most of these crimes could have been prevented by closing and locking doors and removing items of value from view.

Police communication strategies that focus on crime prevention can have a significant influence on the crime rate and one's risk of victimization. This requires messages, focused on specific behavioral changes people can make, which are carefully crafted so as not to cause unnecessary fear or seem to be blaming the victim for the crime. Dealing with these issues increases the complexity of the communication strategy but the potential reward in crime reduction could be substantial.

### TRANSPARENCY

**In today's high-tech world, establishing and maintaining a transparent police organization is easier said than done.** The department's website can provide access to reports, statistics, call records, crime mapping, connections to officials, breaking news, written policy, and all sorts of other information. Deciding what information should be provided, how much, when, and to whom, all while maintaining a respect for the privacy and legal positions of named individuals, are factors that must be weighed against the transparency goal.

There are frequent calls for greater openness in police internal investigations and officer personnel files. The debate on this issue is intense and influenced by concerns with the integrity of the investigation and personnel records privacy laws. Some states make personnel information a public record while most place significant restrictions on what the public can obtain from these files and what an organization can release. **An effective communications strategy can help increase transparency even when dealing with areas where very limited information can be provided to the public.**

### ESSENTIAL AUDIENCES

As police executives think about communicating with the community at large regarding the wide range of policing issues, they also recognize certain audiences are particularly important to achieving the police mission. These audiences consist of people and groups who make decisions and/or influence budgets and programs. They also can give credibility and support to the police while assisting in achieving goals and objectives. Because of their relationships to the police and/or the issues involved, these audiences deserve special consideration in any communication strategy. It is worth the extra effort to ensure they are aware of the issues and the police perspective on them.

## Some Thoughts on Police Communication Strategy:

*The world of police communications has changed dramatically over the past 20 years.*

In the past, the chief or sheriff communicated externally primarily through the news media; speeches in the community and formal reports on activities and issues. Internal communication methods included formal policies, memoranda, meetings, the chain of command, and for some executives, roll call visits or video presentations. All of those methods continue to be used today but there are many more communication options for the chief and department to consider. A website provides unfiltered information that is available to anyone that connects to the site at any time. Properly used, e-mail messages provide direct unfiltered access to all employees for important information if they read them. E-mail saves a lot of time in the effort to connect with people inside and outside the organization by avoiding telephone tag—but not everyone reads their e-mail. The social media, blogs, and video websites also provide communication options that can reach a very large audience with a relatively small investment. However, just like the old methods of communications—the new options have their limitations and downsides.

On the whole, I would have to say that police executives have been fairly slow to embrace these new and developing methods of communication. Despite the enormous frustrations that most have about dealing with the news media, there is a continued reliance on that option as the principal method of informing the community about incidents or important events.

Take the news release as an example: It is probably the most frequently used method of giving the public information that the department wants them to know. The release is carefully drafted, approved, and then sent to the list of media contacts through fax or e-mail. Then you wait to see if anyone from the media contacts you for follow up or if a story appears in the next news cast or edition of the newspaper. How often do news releases result in a story containing the complete information? And if a story appears from the release—how many people saw it or read it? The knowledge we have about how people get information suggests that these stories only get to a small proportion of the audience you would like reach. To ensure your message reaches the target audience you have to take more control.

My journey to the strong belief of the importance of having a communications strategy has developed over a number of years. Like many colleagues, I worked at developing an open and transparent relationship with the news media. I believed that a strong relationship was the basis for ensuring the department's perspective had the opportunity to be shared and the good things the police were doing would gain greater visibility. Although there were some successes along the way—it has largely been a less than satisfying experience. When you add that experience to the knowledge of media audience declines and increased segmentation it is clear that consistent and successful communication through the news media alone, or even as the primary method, will not meet with much success.

Successful and effective communication begins with a plan that takes full advantage of our knowledge and the tools that are now available at a relatively low cost. The CEO sets the tone and models the behavior. *Develop a communications strategy that fits your community and agency—you might find that you are then even more successful with getting exposure in the traditional news media.*

—Darrel W. Stephens, July 2011

### ELECTED OFFICIALS

Elected officials present some unique challenges to police executives. In a council/manager form of government, the police chief reports to the city manager but still must have contact with elected officials and keep them informed of current issues. If the chief is appointed by the mayor, balancing communication with that office and the council is a must. **Elected officials often demand to be informed about incidents or issues before the information appears in the news.** This is a daunting task in today's wired world, and while the chances of being successful 100 percent of the time are slim, it is important to make every effort to minimize those times when elected officials do not receive early (even if by minutes) notice on issues they are likely to hear about from their constituents or the media. The communication strategy has to specify the mechanisms for keeping officials informed and the person(s) responsible. It also has to remind them that incidents may reach the public from time to time before they hear about it from the police.

### COMMUNITY LEADERS

These are individuals who have influence on community affairs. They are business executives, union leaders, nonprofit organization executives and board members, school officials, and others whose views can help shape public and political opinion. **The communication strategy needs to take these leaders into account and include a way to maintain regular contact to keep them informed about current programs, priorities, and emerging issues.**

### NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERS

These are elected neighborhood association officers or individuals who have the respect of neighborhood residents. Most of these leaders have a voice with elected officials and their opinions are sought and usually given strong consideration. **Contact with neighborhood leaders most often comes from officers, supervisors, and commanders responsible for the area in which the neighborhood is located.** These contacts are important and should be a part of the communication strategy along with any other methods of keeping them informed of problems and departmental activities.

### PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS

All communities have public interest groups that exert significant influence on public affairs. The list might include the chamber of commerce, NAACP, domestic violence, victim's advocates, gay rights, environmental protection, youth advocates, homeless advocates, and many others. **Although most of the groups have only a general interest in the police, there are some that make police activities a major part of their agenda.** Not only do police departments need to know who these groups are and their interests, it is important to establish mechanisms to meet their needs for information, particularly those groups whose primary focus intersects with police activities.

### NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

Many communities have substantial populations of residents who do not speak English well, if at all. **In addition to language and cultural barriers, these residents are often afraid of the police because of how policing is conducted in their countries of origin and/or because they may be in the United States illegally. Fearful of being deported, they are reluctant to report being a victim of a crime or becoming involved as a witness.** These growing international populations often spur departments to recruit and hire police personnel with foreign language skills. Many departments have established foreign language versions of their websites to facilitate communication and understanding. They also seek out opportunities to appear on radio and television programs or work with reporters employed by newspapers that target these populations. Communicating with these residents in their own languages does not *solve* the communication problem, but it is a significant step toward helping them understand the importance of reporting crime to the police.

### FAITH COMMUNITIES

Houses of worship represent a significant portion of the population. **They frequently provide services to people in need and collaborate on neighborhood and community-wide initiatives.** Some are involved in political activities by endorsing specific candidates and some will engage in the public discourse on issues of the day. They play an important role throughout the community, but they can be particularly important in African-American communities. Pastors can influence members' views on issues and regularly represent their congregations in dealing with government. **Strong relationships with the faith community and processes for regular communications will serve the police very well.**

### EMPLOYEES

**Effective communications with employees is an area that is a significant ongoing challenge. This is particularly true with police employees who work around the clock every day of the year and seem to be particularly adept at creating rumors and keeping them alive.** Establishing successful communication processes in this environment is especially important because employee opinion influences the views of neighborhood and community leaders as well as the public at large. A new policy, program, or a high profile case can encounter significant difficulty if employees are not informed in a timely way of the department's perspective or rationale. Like elected officials, police employees are loathe to see something on television or in the newspaper they believe should have learned from the organization. Considerable thought, planning, and reinforcement needs to go into developing and implementing an effective communications process. **The tools have to accommodate a 24/7 environment.** Supervisors and managers must understand the department's expectations and provide training to equip them with the necessary skills.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The police have an enormously complex job. They deal with a wide range of issues of great importance to individuals and the community at large. Their performance is judged in each interaction with citizens, many of whom have little real understanding of what the police do beyond what they see on television or read about in newspapers and magazines. **The strongest and most lasting impressions may come from personal or family member contact with police officers and the stories they tell about the interaction.**

**Citizens' expectations of the police vary widely.** Some people in the community expect to see a police officer in their neighborhood frequently and expect immediate response to their 911 call, regardless of the nature of the incident. For others expectations are low—their experience with the police may not have been good, or they just want to have greater control over their own safety so they have purchased alarms, hired security guards, and moved into gated communities. Some are fearful of the police and are comfortable with as little interaction with them as possible. **Yet the police must reach out to every member of the community if they expect to be successful in helping create and sustain a sense of safety.**

Dealing with this wide range of feelings and expectations requires thoughtful and effective communications. The police are certainly familiar with strategy development—from tackling a certain crime category, planning for major events, and creating or modifying local ordinances to determining officer training, handling investigations, and identifying ways to address repeat offenders, police executives have considerable experience with operating in a strategic framework.

Yet, when it comes to thinking about ways to most effectively communicate with stakeholders, strategy seldom emerges, at least not in any way that results in a written plan. As advanced as policing strategies have become in other areas, the communication function has remained largely unchanged over the years—most police agencies emphasize communication tactics rather than strategy, spending most of their time dealing with episodes (the crime or issue of the day), and the news media continue to be the primary vehicle for getting information out to the community.





*Understanding the revolutionary change taking place in mass media is vital for two reasons:*

**First**, *it has been the traditional communication tactic in which the majority of police departments invest the most time and energy.*

**Second**, *mass media is an area that has undergone such profound transitions, that significant changes must also be considered for police public information programs.*

---

---

## CHAPTER II—Where and How People Get Information

This chapter focuses on the changes that have occurred in the way people access, use, and disseminate information, and the resulting implications for police agencies. In addition to advocating for a more strategic framework for public information, public relations, and community engagement, this Toolkit approaches media relations differently than many police organizations do currently. Rather than being the primary means an agency uses to get information out to the public, the news media becomes one tactic among many and, often, not the first one implemented.

This does not mean media relations in general is no longer an important agency activity. On the contrary, it is probably now more important than ever, especially as the field has expanded to encompass a much broader array of participants, including the ever-increasing variety of “new media” players that continue to appear on the scene courtesy of the World Wide Web (the Internet). What it does mean is that a police agency no longer has to—or should—rely primarily on the media to tell their story. **The focus is on developing strategic, proactive, and multi-dimensional communication and community engagement programs that better serve police agencies and their communities.**

One might think this chapter could be shortened considerably simply by saying that traditional media is in rapid decline and more people are going to the Internet for information. **But the migration to online sources of information is only one part of the story and perhaps the least important from a strategic point of view.**

It is not just the fact that more people are going online for news that is of interest to those who seek to inform and engage citizens about policing, crime, and public safety issues. What is truly significant about the migration to the Internet is that while it has made reaching people easier than ever, it has also made it more difficult than ever.

On one hand, the Internet opens up a whole new world of opportunity to have unmediated, direct, ongoing, engaging, and meaningful exchanges with the people in our communities. The online world of news and information has moved from what has long been a passive, sender-based or “push” activity (watching traditional news reports or reading a newspaper), into a realm that is participatory, transactional, increasingly social, and filled with “pull” capabilities.

On the other hand, **audiences are more fractured than ever**, spread across a dizzying number of channels, sites, activities, and venues. It is simply harder to put a message out that gains the same kind of attention it might have gotten before the communication explosion.

People’s perceptions of the news media used to be very favorable. This meant an agency’s message was being delivered by a credible third party. For example, while there were scattered complaints of bias and lack of fairness, surveys during the 1970s and 1980s uniformly reported that Americans had confidence in, admired, and trusted the news media and generally held journalists in high regard (Lipset and Schneider 1987). At the time, it made good sense to use the traditional mass media as the major—sometimes only—tactic for sharing public safety information with citizens.

Those days are gone. While police agencies still field requests for information from reporters and it is still relatively easy and economical to get media coverage of public safety issues, traditional media is no longer the only conduit of mass communication, nor is it necessarily the most effective—and it has certainly lost credibility (Pew Center for People & the Press 2009). In fact, the changes in the media environment have been so vast, and the way people gather and consume news is so dramatically different than just a few short years ago, these circumstances all but demand agencies take a different approach to police–citizen communications.

To develop a fuller understanding of what the digital revolution means for police agencies, cultivate a richer appreciation for the possibilities and see where it makes sense to shift communication priorities—it is worth exploring the significant, even stunning, changes that have occurred in the media landscape.

## THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Police agencies are well acquainted with the demands of the ever-hungry “media beast.”

Stories about crime and the justice system are a staple of the media “diet.” As such, police are a dependable source of stories and for many departments, “feeding the beast” requires full-time staff devoted to the job. Police agencies have invested considerable resources in establishing public information or media relations units to respond to requests for information, provide interviews, and initiate coverage. Most have adopted specific policies, hired or reassigned personnel, provided at least some media training for key staff, and embarked on any number of attempts to find ways of working more effectively with reporters. Whether served by a weekly or daily newspaper, and/or one or several television or radio stations, even small communities have found it necessary to dedicate at least some resources to media relations.

There is little dispute that both law enforcement and the news media play essential roles in a democratic society and are, to a great extent, mutually dependent. The media provides the police with broad access to the public, and the media relies on the police for a steady stream of stories to fill the endless space and time requirements of their respective mediums. Although much of the coverage is focused on the crime du jour, investigative reporters may delve into issues about budgets, resource allocations, policies, procedures, allegations of police misconduct, political infighting, or other controversies.

The quality of police–media relationships vary from department to department, and even from day to day within a department. For many, police–media relations are often characterized as tense and adversarial. Even agencies that enjoy generally positive relationships with the media in their markets find themselves at odds from time to time. From the law enforcement perspective, some argue that the media’s “watchdog” role conveys inherent distrust, which sets up a defensive posture from the start. Others maintain that in pursuit of the “scoop,” reporters care little about issues of privacy or accuracy and even less about whether disclosing certain information may impede an investigation.

From the journalists’ point of view, the police are among the organizations that especially bear watching, since they have enormous power and history is replete with examples of police corruption. Also, members of the media believe the police withhold far more information than they need to—or should—and but for the watchful eye of the fourth estate, would likely keep the public in the dark about everything from crime and police misconduct to how taxpayer money is spent and what procedures are used to do the job of law enforcement.

Whatever the basis for the disparate viewpoints, it remains that the goals of each are frequently at odds. Journalists have a mission to scrutinize, investigate, and disclose as much as possible about issues that concern the public (Overholser and Jamieson 2005). While police certainly have a responsibility to share information with the public, they differ with the media on a host of factors: from what, when, and how much information is released, to the way events are described and the context (or lack thereof) provided.

Despite advances that enable police to communicate directly with large segments of the public, much—if not most—of their time and resources are still devoted to traditional media relations activities. And until recently, this made sense. Not long ago, when a police agency wanted to communicate with a large number of citizens, the traditional mass media was pretty much the only game in town. Departments had little if any funding for public information campaigns and rarely attracted enough people to a community meeting to consider it critical mass. The news media not only controlled the mass distribution channels, but influenced how the public viewed the police. The books and articles that address police public information programs have invariably focused almost exclusively on ways the police could improve media relations

---

For many in law enforcement, police–media relations are often characterized as tense and adversarial.

From the journalists’ point of view, the police are among the organizations that especially bear watching since they have enormous power and history is replete with examples of police corruption.

---

(Morley and Jacobsen 2011; Braunstein & Cheek 2006; Motschall and Cao 2002; Surette 2001). Most highlight the media's dissemination and perception-shaping roles and therefore, stress the importance of courting the local media for coverage. While good media relations still make good sense, it has taken on new qualities and new players. Bloggers, citizen journalists, and social media writers have swelled the ranks of the media corps while traditional media outlets wrestle with economic difficulties that have had substantial impacts on quality and quantity of coverage.

### HOW PEOPLE ACCESS, USE, AND DISSEMINATE INFORMATION

In the early days of mass media, there were few players in the field and most Americans tuned in on a daily basis to local newscasts and read newspapers. Then, as now, the media provided an abundance of coverage of crime and disorder issues, although arguably not always in a way police would prefer. Yet, using mass media was an efficient and cost-effective way to disseminate information, and in many ways, it still is. After all, even news programs with paltry ratings by industry standards are still viewed by thousands of people. But there is little disputing that the ground has seismically shifted.

People have changed the way they gather, consume, and distribute news and information (see Table 1). The changes are profound and underscore the need to develop a communication plan that not only acknowledges that the world is changing, but embraces the opportunities these changes present.

Traditional media are facing enormous competition and significant economic challenges. For television, the competition began with the explosion of cable networks in the 1980s and 1990s. Until then, there were only three major networks and one public television station that offered programming. 6:00 PM was the news hour, and since there was no other programming competing for audiences at that time, the only question was, which news broadcast to watch.

**Fast-forward to today.** According to the Pew Center for People and the Press' biennial survey about news consumption (2008a), the proportion of Americans who say they "read a newspaper on a typical day has declined by about 40 percent; the proportion that regularly watches nightly network news has fallen by half" since the early 1990s. **While this trend is especially pronounced among the younger generations (more than a third of who report getting no news at all on a typical day) it is becoming increasingly true for older generations as well.**

People are working longer hours, have longer commutes, go out for dinner more, attend kids' sporting events, and have any number of other activities that keep them away from home or otherwise occupied at 6:00 PM. And, with the advent of cable television, there are now hundreds of channels competing for people's time and viewing attention, resulting in smaller audiences for any one station or program. People now have many more options, including watching programs they have previously recorded. They do not have to watch news at all. And according to ratings, more and more people are doing exactly that—not watching news.

According to the 2010 State of the Media Report, “Local television news appears to be losing its audience at an accelerating pace. In 2009, viewership at affiliates of the four major networks, which produce most of the local television news in the U.S., declined across all timeslots” (see Figure 1 on page 26) (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010).

The picture was marginally better in 2010. The 2011 State of the Media Report indicates the rate of decline slowed in 2010 and while some timeslots lost more viewers than others, the exception for local television was the audience growth in two new additions to the lineup, the 4:30 AM and 7:00 PM newscasts (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011).

Despite the modest increases, revenues continue to be a problem. While revenues rebounded in 2010 after an especially disastrous 2009, “when adjusted for inflation, average station revenue has dropped by almost half in just the past nine years” (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011).

Table 1

That Was Then	This is Now
A handful of television, radio, and newspaper outlets	Hundreds of media outlets plus community journalism, blogs, and the ever-expanding networks in social media
News delivered only at certain times each day	News on demand 24/7
Paid subscriptions for print media	Free access to most online versions
Relatively high scores for accuracy, trust, and credibility in media	Relatively low scores for accuracy, trust, and credibility in media
Access to the news available through the media outlets in your area	Access to news available from virtually any media outlet—and person with a computer—anywhere in the world
Sit through television commercials	Fast-forward through or skip ads entirely, courtesy of TIVO® or digital cable
Professional journalists reported the news	Anyone with a cell phone, video camera, and a computer reports the news
It was expensive for police agencies to communicate directly with citizens (usually involving direct mail, billboards, or other paid advertising space)	It is increasingly easy to reach people with low- and no-cost tactics
Except for during community meetings and personal interactions, communication was largely one-way	New tools for engagement and ongoing dialogue allow for two-way communication with citizens

Source: Data original to this report and compiled by co-author Julie Hill, Ph.D.

**Lessons Learned**

Thanks to the Internet, often what appears in a printed newspaper is no longer breaking news.

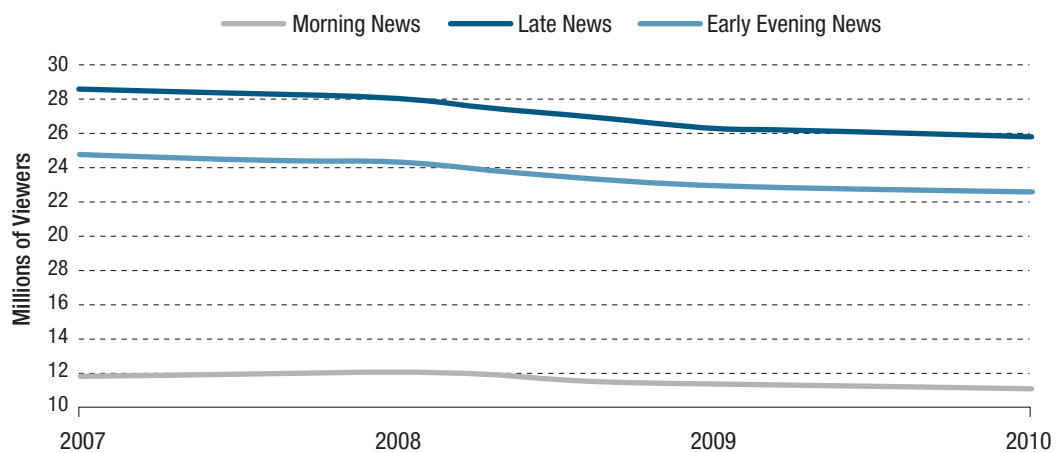
**Fewer people are reading the newspaper, too, although, like local television, the rate of loss slowed in 2010.** Print journalism has seen decreases in subscribers that rival the declines in local television news viewership. In fact, the large metropolitan daily newspapers appear to have incurred the highest losses, while smaller daily or weekly community newspapers have been maintaining circulation (see Figure 2). Many newspapers and magazines have gone out of business, including some of the oldest and best known in the country.

Others reduced the frequency of publication while some went to online-only versions. Of those that remain, most have less content, coverage has become less localized and content has become more homogenized. Thanks to the Internet, often what appears in a printed newspaper is no longer breaking news. Once it was common for the dominant local newspaper to set the news agenda that other media followed. However, the combination of loss of subscribers and smaller newsroom staffs has undoubtedly weakened the newspaper’s leadership position.

Bob Garfield wrote in his 2009 book, *The Chaos Scenario*, “Traditional media are in a stage of dire retrenchment as prelude to complete collapse. Newspapers, magazines, and especially TV as we currently know them are fundamentally doomed, as they shudder against three concurrent, irresistible forces: 1) audience shrinkage with consequent advertiser defection, 2) obsolete methods—and unsustainable costs—of distribution, and 3) competition from every computer user in the whole wide world” (p. 4).

Garfield’s view is particularly grim, but there is evidence to suggest he may not be wrong. Economic problems in recent years took a toll on many industries and the media were especially hard-hit. Loss of advertising revenue resulted in staff lay-offs, from reporters and

Figure 1. Viewership Declines in Key Time Slots



Source: Nielsen Media Research, used under license.  
 Note: Numbers represent ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC affiliates

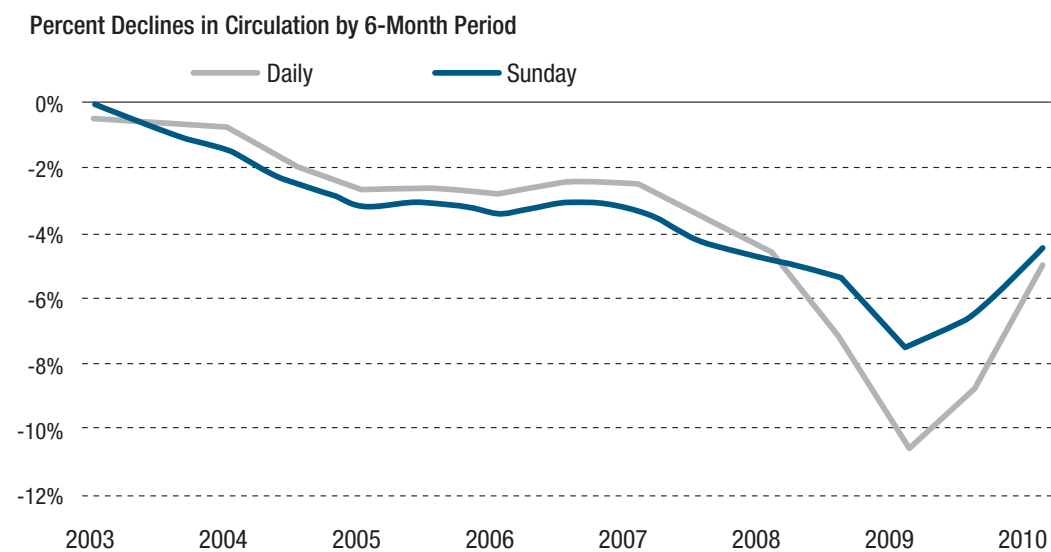
copy editors to producers and editorial writers. In 2008 and 2009, 1,600 jobs were cut from local television newsrooms across the country (Papper 2010). Newspapers are in even worse shape. According to the American Society of News Editors, newsrooms in the United States “have lost more than 25 percent of their full-time staffers bringing the total of full-time journalists working in daily newsrooms to 41,500, a level not seen since the mid-1970s” (“Decline in newsroom jobs” 2010).

The 2009 State of the Media Report issued by the Pew Research Center summed it up this way: “This is the sixth edition of our annual report on the State of the News Media in the United States. It is also the bleakest” (p. 4). The economic news was no better in its 2010 Report, as traditional media, especially newspapers, continued to suffer huge losses. Newspapers lost 43 percent in ad revenue over a 3-year period while local television chalked up losses of 22 percent in 2009 alone. Among commercial news outlets, only cable news did not see losses in revenue in 2009.

The 2011 Report is less dire but its predictions for the future, even after the economy improves, are not especially encouraging, as researchers estimate ad revenues will remain low for traditional media, taking in 41 percent less than they did in 2006 (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010). While some media outlets are beginning to make up revenue through online advertising, it is woefully inadequate to support the kind of news-gathering and distribution efforts we once knew.

Newsrooms are doing more and more with less and less, resulting in less coverage, more repackaging or recycling of stories and footage, more syndication and arguably diminished journalistic quality.

Figure 2. Newspaper Circulation Declines for 15 Consecutive Periods



Source: Deutsche Bank Securities and Audit Bureau of Circulations.  
 PEW Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011 State of the News Media

The public's assessment of the accuracy of news stories is now at its lowest level in more than two decades.

—Pew Research Survey  
2009

---

**Where has the revenue gone?** Some dried up as a result of the poor economy and businesses cutting back on advertising. Other culprits that have siphoned ad revenue are websites like eBay, craigslist and Auto Trader, which allow people to list items for sale at little or no expense to reach much larger audiences. Real estate, automobile, and employment classified advertising, once dominant features in newspapers also have gone online. And while a few of these sites are connected to a newspaper, many are not. People access them for free or for a nominal subscription fee that bypasses the news outlet—and its bank account—altogether. Still, where people turn for information is only a part of the story. Issues of quality, credibility, and trustworthiness often surface in discussions about the changing media environment.

### DECLINES IN TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

There are many reasons a proactive, strategic approach to an agency's communications makes good sense, especially one that emphasizes direct communication with the public. Chief among these reasons may come as a surprise to some: **Generally speaking, the community actually trusts the police more than the media. So why would you relinquish custody of your agency's story to a source viewed as less trustworthy and credible than your own?**

In its heyday, generally between the 1950s and 1980s, American media enjoyed fairly high credibility marks. The major network news, local broadcast news, and daily newspapers each enjoyed considerable power and credibility. People tended to trust what they heard from these sources and turned to them to get the “independent truth.” A majority of citizens in 1985, for example, (55 percent, according to the Pew Center 2009) believed the news stories they heard, read, and saw were accurate. Fast forward 25 years, and we have a very different picture.

According to a 2009 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, just 29 percent of Americans believe news organizations generally get the facts straight, while 63 percent say news stories are often inaccurate. “The public's assessment of the accuracy of news stories is now at its lowest level in more than two decades of Pew Research surveys, and Americans' views of media bias and independence now match previous lows” (p. 2). A 2008 People-Press survey indicated “most Americans (56 percent) have an unfavorable opinion of the news media” (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2008b).

Similarly, Edelman (2011) found trust in traditional media continues to wane. Among older (ages 25–64) informed publics, trust in media dropped to just 27 percent, a decline of 11 percent from 2010 to 2011.

U.S. Gallup's 2010 Confidence in Institutions (Morales 2011) reinforces this view. By a margin of more than 100 percent, people indicated they have more confidence in the police (59 percent) than they do in newspapers (25 percent) or television news (22 percent). In fact, only two institutions ranked higher than police—the military (76 percent) and small business (66 percent). What is especially interesting, however, is that since 1993 when the survey began to include the police in the list of institutions under question, the police have consistently had stronger confidence indicators than the criminal justice system as a whole (27 percent) and the media (Saad 2010). See Figure 3 on page 30.



Americans' confidence in newspapers and television news rebounded slightly in Gallup's 2011 survey (27 and 28 percent, respectively), while their confidence in the police dipped slightly, to 56 percent (Morales 2011). See Figure 4 on page 31.

Sherman (2002) explains some of the disparity in how people ranked the criminal justice system as a whole as opposed to the police in particular. He argues, **“The large differences suggest that Americans may not think of the police as part of the criminal justice system”** (p. 6–7). However, another explanation for this disparity could be that people understand that some parts of the system are more effective than others and until all of the criminal justice partners are effective, the system taken as a whole receives low marks.

*Overall and despite popular opinion, the public's confidence in the police seems to have little to do with crime rates or perceptions of police conduct. While levels vary (for example, minority residents generally express lower levels of trust and confidence in the police than do white residents), confidence “in the ability of the police to protect citizens from violent crime” barely changed from 1981 to 1998, despite substantial decreases in crime.*

*Similarly, about 45 percent of poll respondents from 1981 to 1997 have rated the honesty and ethical standards of police officers as “high” or “very high,” with barely a drop following the Rodney King incident or the O.J. Simpson murder trial (Sherman 2002, 7).*

Lovell (2001) found that “the quality of a department's media image has little to do with the municipality crime rate and more to do with how departments manage crime news and information” (p. iv).

### VIEWERSHIP, READERSHIP, AND LISTENERSHIP

Does anybody read anymore? Judging from newspaper and magazine subscription numbers, you might think not. In a “perfect storm” that continues to see print publications hemorrhaging readership, and advertising spending down across all media, commercial journalism is undergoing an industry-wide realignment. And it is hard to determine which media—television, print, or radio—has the gravest prognosis. While the cure may be as bad as the sickness, there is little doubt that “change or die” is the treatment. The question remains, change to what? And how do the changes play out for police agencies, many of which have been heavily dependent on the news media as a cornerstone of public information efforts?

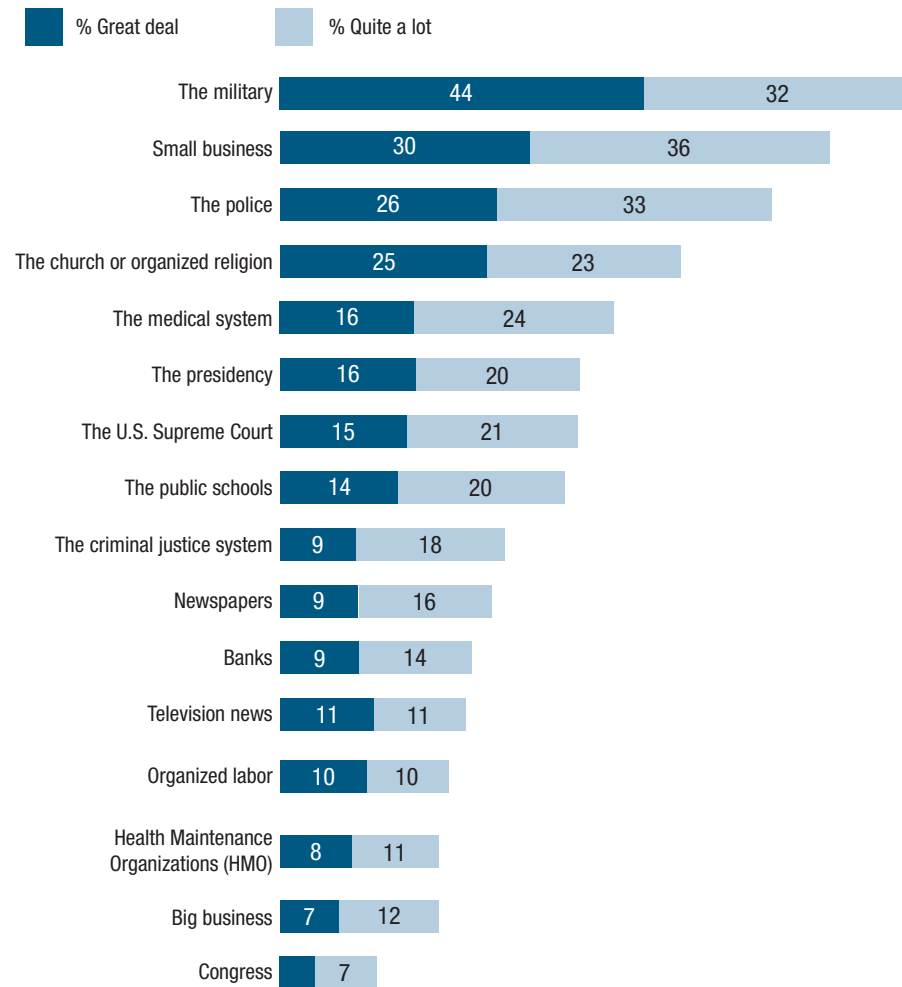
### PRINT MEDIA

Despite a U.S. population increase of nearly 500 percent, there are just about half as many daily newspapers in circulation as there were in 1910 (National Newspaper Association 2009). Only weeklies have grown in recent years because they fill niches generally untouched by larger publications. They appeal to smaller special interest groups (i.e., ethnic, religious, lifestyle, and smaller communities) and meet the needs of communities that desire a return to highly localized news and information that does more than feature crime and politics.

Figure 3. A Snapshot of Public Confidence in American Institutions

I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one—a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little?

July 8–11, 2010



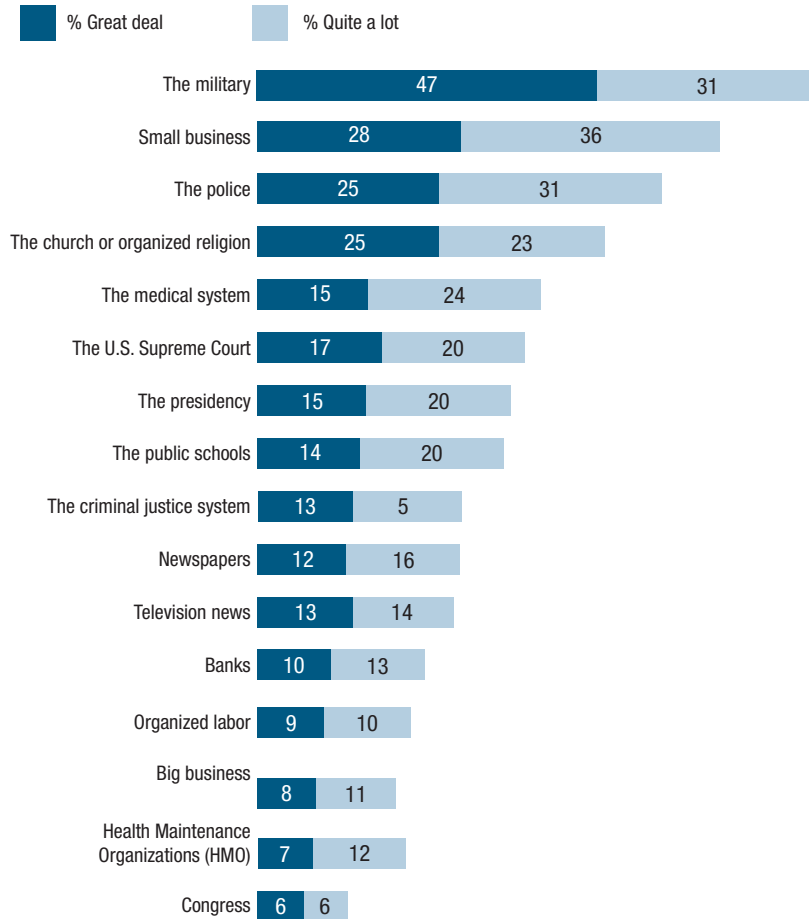
Source: Gallup (July 2010)

Since 2000, declines in newspaper circulation have mounted to more than 25 percent (Pew Project 2010, p. 8). In 2009 alone, the losses were more than 10 percent. Rocked by revenue and readership declines and with the younger generation abandoning print in favor of online news grazing, scores of newspapers and/or their parent companies are contemplating or have already declared bankruptcy. Many of them are large, even venerable institutions. The Tribune Company, which owns the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and other newspapers, along with 23 television stations and the Chicago Cubs baseball team, filed for bankruptcy protection in late 2008. The Freedom Company, publisher of more than 100 daily and weekly newspapers, filed for bankruptcy protection in 2009.

Figure 4. Confidence in Institutions

I am going to read you a list of institutions American society. Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one—a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little?

June 9–12, 2010



Source: Gallup (July 2010)

Others have given up the print versions of their publications and gone to an online-only form (i.e., *Christian Science Monitor*). Still more have gone out of business altogether (i.e., *Rocky Mountain News*, *Tucson Citizen*, and *Albuquerque Tribune*). There is even a website dedicated to chronicling the “death of the newspaper” appropriately called Newspaper Death Watch ([newspaperdeathwatch.com](http://newspaperdeathwatch.com)). The website, [magazinedeathpool.com](http://magazinedeathpool.com), chronicles the fate of magazines.

National magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, and *U.S. News & World Report* may not be on a department’s daily media distribution list, but they have played an important role over the years in shedding light on more global public safety issues, such as the rise of juvenile crime (Toufexis 1989), the pending release of a large number of prison inmates (Kinsbury 2007), and the increase in gangs (Murr 1999).

*U.S. News & World Report* switched from a weekly to a bimonthly and then a monthly publication before ditching its print version for an online only presence. Taking a different approach, *Newsweek* became more of a niche publication than a general news magazine, and *Time* was retooled to focus on broader, thematic topics and analysis.

Clearly, the economics of 2008 and 2009 have not been kind to the magazine industry. As the authors of the State of the Media 2009 report summarized, “For American news magazines, 2008 may be seen as the year when the traditional mass audience model finally collapsed” (Pew Center 2009).

### TELEVISION

Before cable television became widely available in the 1980s and 1990s, most households tuned in to one of the three broadcast networks or the one public television station. With such limited choice, each station was able to claim large viewing audiences. Even in the early days of cable television, the networks dominated the airways. Just a fifth of the U.S. population subscribed to cable by 1990. Still, people began to see viewing choices steadily increase, as cable networks grew from 28 in 1980 to 79 by 1989 (National Cable and Telecommunications Association). As laws and regulations for the industry were developed, networks proliferated. By 1998, there were 171 national cable video networks. That number swelled to 280 just 4 years later, and new, niche networks continue to debut. With programming via satellite, the advent of digital cable, and the invention of TiVo, people not only have a dizzying array of choices of what to watch, but they can record and save a program for a later time without having to learn how to program a VCR or make sure they are not taping over the birth of a child or a wedding. Factor in the increasing availability of television programs and full-length movies available on the Internet and the options for news and entertainment are staggering.

**In just a few short decades, the U.S. television industry went from four stations to more than 300.** While more people may be watching television, fewer are watching any one station at any particular time, unless a major event captures the collective attention of the nation. Tragedies and spectacles tend to do this: The Challenger shuttle explosion in 1986; the O.J. Simpson murder trial; the events of September 11, 2001; the deaths of such public figures as Lady Diana (1997) and Michael Jackson (2009); the 2010 BP Oil spill in the gulf; the start of the war in Iraq in 2002; the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic games; and the 2011 shooting in Tucson.

It used to be that if you missed the evening news, the only option was to wait for the next newscast. That is no longer the case and the downward trend in ratings reflects a decisive shift away from waiting for news. An analysis of Nielsen Media Research data showed declines across all timeslots at both the local and national levels. While the researchers acknowledge some markets may be faring better than others, they maintain the “numbers reveal a clear pattern across more than 200 markets, roughly 800 stations” (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010).

People want to get news when they want it, not when a network decides to air it. The Internet has all but made traditional television newscasts obsolete. Recent data indicates the market for the major broadcast and cable networks is, like newspaper readers, simply aging out. According to a study of Nielsen data released in August 2010 by analyst Steve Sternberg, Fox News has the oldest audience at 65 years old on average. CNN's audience averages 63 years of age, while MSNBC's was 59 and CNBC attracted the youngest audience—52 years old on average. These numbers are consistent with other research that pegs the average age of network news viewers at 62.3 years old (Sternberg 2010).

A common complaint in law enforcement circles is that people too often expect police and their work to resemble what they see in some popular television police drama.

### **A quarter of local television news story budgets are focused on crime.**

Newspapers have a comparable propensity to concentrate coverage on crime. With blocks of time and space to fill every day and fewer journalists to create the content, incidents of crime are dependable fodder, complete with compelling imagery of human actors (and sometimes animals) caught up in unfolding dramas. To feed this appetite for all things criminal, assignment editors and producers listen intently to squawking police scanners. When a snippet of radio traffic piques their interest, they either call their police contacts for more information, or dispatch reporters to the scene, or both. They record what is happening at the scene. They interview officials, victims, and their friends or family. They interview complete strangers, bystanders, and “experts.” Reporters might tweet or blog about an unfolding situation before their live shot or in advance of an editorial deadline. At some point, they compose a video, print, or audio story meant to convey what happened. And they are supposed to accomplish this, for television and radio, in one minute and 15 seconds (usually less); for newspapers, they get at best, several column inches, but often, just a paragraph or two. And while it used to be that news stories were edited and polished before airing, the push to quickly post something to a news outlet's website has made this a luxury few can afford.

While research is mixed on the extent to which the media influences people's perceptions of police and crime and their overall fear of victimization, there is little dispute that how the media cover crime tends to distort the reality of crime experienced. For instance, while crimes against property (theft, vandalism, car break-ins) are far more common, violent crimes (homicides, rape, and robbery) dominate news coverage. And it is not just the news media that contribute to people's unrealistic and inaccurate perceptions of policing.

Through movies, weekly dramas, and “reality” programs, television often creates compelling and persistent visual images of what policing, crime, criminals, and the justice system must be like “in real life.” A common complaint in law enforcement circles is that people too often expect police and their work to resemble what they see in some popular television police drama. This is not a new complaint.

Police work in one form or another has been a programming mainstay since the early days of television. While crime dramas like *Rookie Blue*, *24*, *Blue Blood*, *Law and Order*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, and *NCIS* are contemporary favorites, *Hawaii 5-0*, *Kojak*, *Mannix*, *Cagney and Lacey*, *Ironsides*, *Adam 12*, *The Mod Squad*, *Dragnet*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *NYPD Blue* are just some of the early police dramas that populated the airways. And although characters and situations change, the results are strikingly similar from program to program and week to week: action-packed situations involving complex, multi-faceted crimes that detectives or officers solve, with suspects arrested, in 60 minutes or less; glorification of sometimes unorthodox, even illegal, investigatory methods designed to overcome an inadequate justice system or perceived weaknesses in the law; crime scene investigators able to lift perfectly intact fingerprints from virtually any surface or find some item that contains valuable DNA; witnesses who cooperate and provide uncannily accurate descriptions of suspects and circumstances, and suspects who are often despicable or diabolical.

Add “reality” police shows like “Gangland,” “Cops,” and “First 48” to the mix and we begin to see how a steady diet of law enforcement drama playing out in one’s living room each week can, absent any personal experience to the contrary, lead people to believe that these programs provide accurate glimpses of police work. This translates into a media agenda that has often been a source of frustration for police agencies, even those who participate in these reality shows. However justified this frustration, it begs several questions:

- What can police departments do to influence a news agenda?
- What should departments do?
- Would a more direct, unmediated line of communication with the citizens they serve help to convey more accurate images?

## RADIO

With an average of just one news reporter at a commercial radio station, daily crime reporting is less of a staple in radio than other media. For most police agencies, a radio station’s news reporting has not been terribly significant, in part because the format does not lend itself to the same kind of daily crime coverage seen on television and in print. **From a communicator’s standpoint, however, the opportunity for two-way interaction through call-ins and extended interview formats is what sets radio apart from print and other traditional electronic media.**

Many stations that carry talk radio programs only air those that are nationally syndicated, including Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, and Sean Hannity, whose topics seldom focus on a particular police agency or crime issue in any one location unless an exceptionally controversial incident captures their attention.

According to media research company Arbitron, there were 1,583 stations in the “news/talk/information” category in 2009, 50 more than the previous year. Although most stations are now available for online listening and listenership is growing steadily, the vast majority of people listen to the radio while in their car.

TALKERS Magazine, a trade publication, conducts an annual Research Project designed to capture data about talk radio audiences (see Figure 5). Stations that feature local radio talk programs are the ones that periodically focus on crime and issues involving the police. Like their syndicated counterparts, the overwhelming majority of local talk radio hosts are outspokenly conservative, so these programs are less about news and more about editorial entertainment.

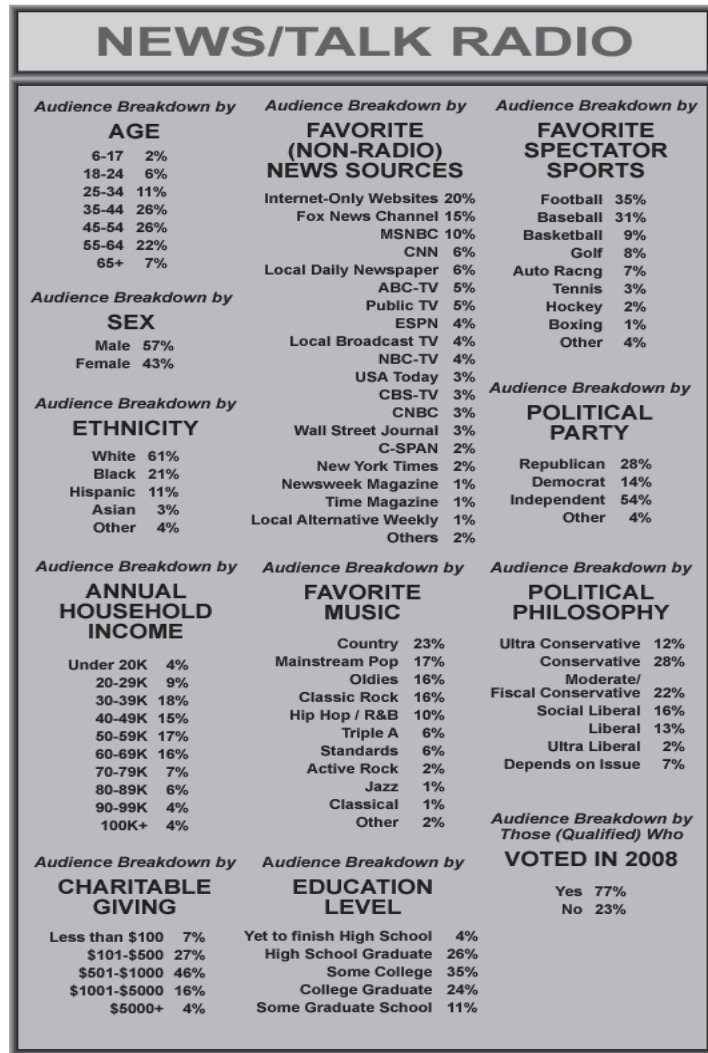
### THE ONLINE MIGRATION

As the traditional news media accessed in the traditional way (watching television and reading a print version of a newspaper) continues to decline, online access to these and other sources is skyrocketing.

One of the most active chroniclers of the whole issue of where people get their news is the Pew Research Center, a non-profit, non-partisan “fact tank” established in 2004 as a subsidiary of the Pew Charitable Trusts. In particular, its Internet and American Life Project, Project for Excellence and Journalism, and Project for People and the Press each conduct surveys, analyze data, and issue reports regarding news sources, demographics of users, and trends. Through their work, we can have a clearer understanding not only of what is happening, but how to better align public information efforts to improve communication and relationships between law enforcement and the public.

Below is a bevy of statistics culled from reports from the Pew Center’s various research projects and other sources. Given the speed with which the digital revolution is occurring, the data will probably be dated no matter when this toolkit is published. So, rather than use the findings as “current” data, they are meant to underscore the very different and rapidly changing media landscape. Further, taken together, this data offers evidence that a different strategy for communicating with citizens could provide police agencies with more productive ways to increase community engagement, generate stronger support for policing activities, and develop a better understanding of crime and safety issues.

Figure 5. 2010 Talk Radio Research Project™



TALKERS Magazine (<http://talkers.com/online/?p=7286>)

### Let us start by identifying some of the trends:

- **More Americans get their news from the Internet** than from newspapers or radio, and three-fourths say they hear of news via e-mail or updates on social media sites (Purcell et al. 2010, 3).
- **Most people use multiple platforms** (television, newspaper, radio, and the Internet) although they are more likely to consult multiple websites than multiple television or radio stations.
- **Sites like Facebook and Twitter have continued to evolve** from almost exclusively social sites to platforms that provide immediate access to breaking news.
- **News has become an increasingly *social* experience.** According to Purcell et al. (2010), “75 percent of online news consumers say they get news forwarded through e-mail or posts on social networking sites, and 52 percent say they share links to news with others via those means” (p. 4).
- **News has become an increasingly *participatory* experience. More than one-third of Internet users have contributed to the creation of news,** provided commentary or spread news via social media (Purcell et al. 2010, 4).
- **Mobile technology has fueled the public’s demand for immediate access to updated information.**
- **Blogs and mainstream news websites** overlap only slightly when it comes to topics each cover. Blogs tend to function much like talk radio, discussing issues from a particular point of view (i.e., conservative, liberal, and libertarian) as opposed to promoting a more objective airing of the facts.
- **Young people may have been the early adopters in social media, but adults are catching up.** Nearly “half (47 percent) of Internet users ages 50-64 and one in four (26 percent) users age 65 and older now use social networking sites” (Madden 2010, 1).
- **In August 2010, Facebook surpassed Google as the most visited website in the United States** ([www.reuters.com/article/2010/12/30/us-facebook-google-idUSTRE6BT40320101230](http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/12/30/us-facebook-google-idUSTRE6BT40320101230)).
- **In June 2010 alone, 93 million Internet users visited Twitter.com. With 300,000 new users joining the Twitter ranks each day** ([www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/04/twitter-facts-and-figures-history-statistics/](http://www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/04/twitter-facts-and-figures-history-statistics/)), and an overall 109 percent growth over the previous year, this global social networking site is ranked 11th worldwide, and 7th in the United States based on web traffic [Top Sites]).
- **As impressive as Twitter traffic** may be, it is a good distance behind Facebook and YouTube. Facebook claims more than 750,000 million users worldwide ([www.facebook.com/#!/press/info.php?statistics](http://www.facebook.com/#!/press/info.php?statistics)) while the video sharing website,



YouTube, gets a staggering 2 billion views each day. Every minute, people collectively upload 24 hours worth of video to YouTube. More video is uploaded to the site in 60 days than was created in 60 years by the three major U.S. television stations (YouTube Facts and Figures 2010).

**What should we make of these facts and figures? In broad terms, the Internet has given birth, not only to new platforms, but to whole new ways of creating, interacting with and sharing information, debating issues, and developing common ground.** The power of online connectivity simply cannot be achieved in any other environment. And yet, it is also a venue that enables the dissemination of damaging lies, rumors, and vitriolic diatribes. To be sure, there is an astonishing amount of highly questionable information out there. People with WAY too much time on their hands and WAY too little accurate information and/or grasp on reality are writing absurd and ridiculous blather. Some choose to do so anonymously, and that seems to embolden them to be especially incendiary, shockingly offensive, incredibly rude, and unabashedly uncivil. Media outlets frequently have to disable their public comment feature on certain articles because of abusive and offensive posts.

One of the reasons many people in general, and law enforcement agencies in particular, are reluctant to immerse themselves in online community-building and public education is that they will almost certainly attract some of these people to their venues. Confrontations are not particularly pleasant and it takes skill to handle them appropriately in any venue. It is not much different than an especially contentious community meeting at which citizens who, displeased with the police in some way, may express themselves with emotional, attack-filled rhetoric. The difference is, online comments have a permanence that the spoken and unrecorded remarks do not and they reach a much larger audience. Still, the police have not stopped having community meetings because the crowds can be difficult. They continue to hold such meetings because there is tremendous value in maintaining open lines of communication and building relationships. Training staff to effectively manage the challenging interactions is a key to maximizing the utility of the practice. These same skills can be put to use in online forums.

Just as the traditional media is a hungry beast, online audiences are perhaps even more so, as the Internet has created an unabated appetite for immediate, on-demand access to continually updated content. When done well, a police agency has much more control over the content, messaging, and context than when they leave the job of informing citizens only to third parties, whether the third parties are journalists, community activists, or talk radio jocks.

Before the Internet, virtually all media was “push” media; that is, information flowed one-way, pushed out from the news generator to a waiting audience on the other end of a television, radio, or print publication. The pre-web media was a largely passive medium. The Internet has created a whole new generation of people who are “pullers”—who want to hunt and gather their own bits and pieces of information. This creates a tremendous opportunity for police agencies to self-publish the kind of material designed to appeal to the habits of the information hunter-gatherer.

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Dramatic changes in where and when people get news and information have important ramifications for the communications functions of any police agency, especially those that depend on the traditional news outlets for much of their public information responsibilities. These changes are challenging the very survival of newspapers and local television news stations, and the longer-term impacts on traditional media are still unknown. Will they survive? Some have already succumbed to the economic and demographic changes that are wreaking havoc on newsrooms across the country. Others are actively searching for new models of journalistic expression that may or may not prove financially viable. And while many journalists are pessimistic about the future of their own media corporations, many believe if they survive, they will be very different.

What these changes offer police departments is the opportunity to exert more control over their own stories, engage citizens in preventing crime, educate people about public safety issues, and dispel some myths about police work. Departments that have advanced public information programs geared toward public safety issues unrelated to a particular crime have met with varying degrees of success in engaging the traditional news media. It takes ongoing and repetitive efforts to achieve sustained media coverage of mundane issues such as what citizens can do to reduce risks of victimization, how they can work together and with police to address neighborhood nuisances, and when to call 911. But the test is different when the agency self-publishes. The challenge, then, is developing a communication function that not only takes a strategic approach to the job, but takes full advantage of the range of tactics, and ensures consistency of purpose and message, identifying and tailoring information to specific audiences.

*With a strategic approach, we are constructing a research-based, objective-driven plan with identified target audiences and key messages.*

*We pre-determine what tactics to employ and specify how results will be measured.*

---

## **CHAPTER III – Developing Strategic Communication Plans**

Employing new information delivery methods without a strategy and well thought-out plan rarely achieves an executive's intended purpose.

Public relations is about building relationships, and not only does that take time, it also takes a consistent focus. Relationships take work. Similarly, influencing attitudes and changing behavior take time and continual reinforcement. A tactically driven approach seldom has the staying power or the focus required for sustained change.

The plan does not chronicle every communication activity of the department, just as a business plan does not include every operational activity. Not only is that impossible, it is unnecessary. Rather, strategic plans reflect a priority of effort to address certain aspects of the work, not the entire universe of work.

### **A STRATEGIC APPROACH**

Taking a strategic approach to communication means an organization thinks through and purposefully ties its communication efforts to broader goals and objectives. All too often, the focus is on tools and tactics. News releases, web pages, editorials, media relations, brochures, e-newsletters, Facebook and Twitter feeds, etc. are all tools. A focus on tools and tactics without grounding them in a strategic framework is like having a hammer and hitting everything with it even though a screwdriver or some other tool might be better.

A strategic framework focuses on tools and tactics last, not first. Before deciding what communication vehicles to use, the department must first determine what it wants to accomplish. While the police department's operating/business goals and objectives are part of the plan's foundation, research may uncover additional issues that merit attention.

**While there are a variety of different planning models, each has some variation of the following seven elements:**

1. Research and Situation Analysis
2. Goals and Objectives
3. Target Audiences
4. Communication Strategies
5. Messages

(Once these elements are clear, the plan moves on to the final two steps)

6. Tactics and Implementation
7. Evaluation—Measures of Success

Each of these elements is discussed in greater detail below:

### **STEP 1: RESEARCH AND SITUATION ANALYSIS**

The first step in developing a strategic communication plan is to assess the current state of the organization. This analysis provides the groundwork or foundation on which the rest of the plan—goals, objectives, strategies, messages, and tactics—is based.

The intent is to develop a complete and honest assessment of the organization and its environment, both internally and externally. A situation analysis is part organizational history, part SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), and part reputational assessment. Taken together, these elements present a picture of the organization that enables communication planning to pinpoint specific areas that need to be addressed.

**Many different types of research can be used to develop the situation analysis, including:**

- **Communication Audits**

In the general sense, an audit is a process that inventories the various communication tools, resources, messages, and elements within an organization. Organizations can either develop their own surveys and information-gathering processes or make use of some of the commercially available audits. The ICA Audit, named after the International Communication Association which sponsored the original research that led to its development, is in the public domain (see Goldhaber and Rogers 1979, for early work). Other instruments, such as the Organizational Communication Assessment survey, the Downs-Hazen Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire, and the Organizational Communication Development survey, are available for fee-licensed use.

- **Content Analysis of Media Coverage**

It is all too easy to be preoccupied with the instances when issues receive especially negative or inaccurate coverage. Like the audit, an analysis of media coverage over a certain period of time can yield vast amounts of objective information about the issues being discussed concerning the department, its work, and its relationships with various stakeholders, how community sentiment is being expressed, and the gaps in information that should be filled. There are a variety of ways to look at the content of media stories. The most basic involves simply categorizing coverage based on topics covered, how much time or space is devoted to certain topics (crime, the police department or issues of public safety), and whether a story is generally positive, negative, or neutral.

More advanced content analysis that examines what messages are communicated through various media stories may be quite useful in evaluating what is—and is not—being said, but requires some advanced research skills. While software programs have been developed to assist with analysis, content analysis is another good candidate for working with a university or college. Contact the communication, mass media, or even business faculty to find out whether they, their graduate students, or advanced undergraduate students would be interested in the project.

- **Survey Results**

Most municipalities and a large number of police agencies conduct internal and/or external surveys to gauge such things as employee and citizen satisfaction and perceptions of services. They range from informal “customer feedback” cards to more formally administered surveys designed to offer reasonable validity and reliability to the data.

- **Interviews and/or Focus Groups with Key Sources (internal and external)**

Involving the right players is a key to developing a robust and ultimately useful analysis. Ideally, the department should identify a good cross-section of both internal and external stakeholders to interview, invite to participate in focus groups, and/or survey. Talking with certain individuals or groups offers a level of depth not usually available through surveys. Using interviews and focus groups to interpret and examine survey results enables the department to explore issues, generate ideas, and assess potential action steps. These forums may also provide a solid base of support for the communication strategy.

## Interviews and Focus Groups

Ask questions to uncover such things as:

- What does the public think about the agency? What does the agency think about the people and community?
- How do these perceptions shape discourse, action, and media response?
- Do current perceptions and relations stifle outreach, progress, problem solving, or connections?
- How can current issues be reframed to evoke a different way of thinking?
- What sets the department apart?
- What does the department do well? Not so well?

- **Document Reviews for Historical Perspective**

From annual reports and planning documents to business plans, reviewing this material provides a basis for understanding how the police department has evolved, which issues have changed, and how and which have remained constant over time.

- **Critiques of Existing Communication**

From annual critiques of existing communication literature and material—how a police department presents material says a lot about its brand, its professionalism, and its quality focus. Everything from letterhead, business cards, brochures, and videos to web copy, social media posts, reports, and presentations should be gathered and examined with a critical eye. How many different business card designs are in use? Do the brochures and other printed material have a consistent look and feel? Are they well-written? Do they reflect a level of professional polish or amateurish production? All of these aspects say something about the department and how it is perceived. Conscious attention to its presentation of information allows the department to exert greater influence on the impressions people form.

The point of this research is to gather as much information as possible to describe the organization and the current situation:

- Goals and Objectives
- How It Is Organized
- How It Is Perceived
- Strengths and Weaknesses
- Issues to be Addressed
- Opportunities for Advancing Its Position in the Community

**There are three mistakes people often make in this phase that can derail the effort before it gets started:** The first mistake is to approach the work as if everything is wrong. To varying degrees, every police department has its challenges and problems. Some are quite serious and may take considerable effort and significant organizational and/or operational changes to address. Certainly corruption, police brutality, racial profiling, and ineffective policing must be addressed and corrected. And communicating about what is being done, when, and how are extremely important considerations.

**Every department also has its strengths and positive aspects that should not be overlooked in one's zeal to "fix what's ailing us." To dwell only on the negative does a huge disservice to the organization.** Just like calling out news articles that are decidedly negative, police executives must make sure that their own work does not suffer from a similar bias. The more complete and balanced the situation analysis is, the more accurate the communication plan can be.

The second mistake is to ignore “the elephant in the middle of the living room,”—these are the issues that are sensitive or may shed light on deficiencies. Just as the situation analysis should not dwell only on the negative, neither should it sidestep issues. The police executive has an essential role in ensuring that the climate in which the plan is developed allows for the honest identification of issues.

The third error is to include “fixes” for non-public relations aspects of the organization. For example, one’s research might uncover that officers overwhelmingly favor a 4-day work week instead of the current 5-day schedule. It is perfectly acceptable to identify this in the research as an issue that might be symptomatic of organizational unrest or an area in which there seems to be a lack of information being shared. However, it is not a public relations objective to recommend changes to officers’ schedules. Similarly, research may reveal that citizens want to see police increase patrols in their neighborhoods. Again, while it is reasonable to address issues of police visibility from a communication perspective, it is not a strategic communication objective to include any objectives aimed at adding patrols to certain neighborhoods.

## STEP 2: DETERMINING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

**From the situation analysis, goals and objectives take shape.** Strategic communication goals and objectives are specifically focused on supporting the department’s mission and vision while assisting in achieving its operational goals and objectives.

Public relations goals and objectives are framed in much the same way as a department’s operating or business plan goals. That is, **while a goal is general and aspirational, designed to describe a desired end, objectives are specific and measurable statements that define what work needs to be done to reach the goal.** Goals are the horizon. Objectives are the path to follow to get there.

There are generally three types of goals in public relations (Smith 2009) (see Figure 6):

- **Reputation Management Goals** are concerned with perceptions of the standing, identity, or character of the department.
- **Relationship Management Goals** focus on initiating, enhancing, or maintaining relationships between the organization and its stakeholders.
- **Task Management Goals** deal with achieving specific tasks, such as increasing participation in Neighborhood Watch, attracting more residents to community meetings, or increasing support for department priorities.

Figure 6.



**Each type of goal should factor in to a department’s strategic communication plan.**

The situation analysis should identify the particular mix of goals that would best help the department move from its current state to the desired future state. Some departments may focus more on task goals than reputation or relationship goals, while others may see the need to focus almost exclusively on reputation and relationship management goals, at least in a first phase of the plan. Thinking about the goals in these categories helps to guard against temptations to stray away from communication-related goals.

**Objectives should be focused on expected results or outcomes and measured in terms of success or gains made.** Here is the crux of the difference between a strategic approach and a tactical approach to communication—when an agency is tactically driven, measurement tends

The “SMART” acronym, coined by Peter Drucker in 1954, is still a useful way to think about the objectives of a strategic plan:

**Specific**

**Measurable**

**Agreed**

**Realistic**

**Timed**

to be about how many news releases are sent out, the number of media interviews provided, how many newsletters, brochures, web pages, videos, and other collateral material are produced, the number of community meetings held, etc. This is a “P.R.-by-the-pound” approach that is all too common, not just in police departments, but in all kinds of organizations.

Other than making the communications staff appear quite busy, there is little value in these sorts of measures. The question remains, “So what?” What did this flurry of activity actually yield in terms of meaningful results that helped the department achieve its goals, address its problems, and reinforce its positive aspects?

Without a strategic approach with the right objectives, there is no way to effectively answer this question.

Objectives in strategic communication programs are usually informational; aimed at increasing awareness, understanding, and/or support—or motivational; designed to change opinions and attitudes and influence behavior (Wilcox and Cameron 2012). A specific issue or problem is what should drive the formulation of the specific objective.

For example, suppose the situation analysis revealed there is a lack of visibility of the police department’s neighborhood watch program and larceny from auto is a growing problem in suburban neighborhoods. The informational objectives to address these situations might focus on increasing awareness and/or understanding by:

- Raising awareness of the neighborhood watch program among residents living within a one-mile radius of the city center.
- Educating suburban neighborhood residents that thefts from vehicles are often preventable.



Motivational objectives for these same programs might be:

- Increasing participation in the neighborhood watch program by 30 neighborhoods from the area within a one-mile radius of the city center by the end of the fiscal year.
- Decreasing larcenies from auto involving unlocked vehicles by 15 percent in suburban neighborhoods by convincing residents to secure vehicles parked in their driveways and to remove valuables.

While informational objectives are a little harder to measure, both objectives are framed to identify outcomes with quantifiable results. From these objectives, target audiences and specific communication tactics or activities can be developed.

### STEP 3: TARGET PUBLICS

**Police agencies have many different stakeholders, both internal to the organization and external,** who have a stake in the success or failure of the department. Not every stakeholder, however, is necessarily a target public for the purposes of the strategic plan. It is important to keep in mind that there is no such thing, for public relations purposes, as “the general public” (Grunig 1997).

**For strategic planning purposes, carefully identifying and segmenting publics is like using a rifle instead of a shotgun.** Smith (2009) suggests that distinguishing between audiences and publics (or stakeholders) is a useful way to think about the various groups with some sort of tie to the department.

Audiences, according to Smith (2009), are much broader, undefined groups that are made up of people who have only a passing, temporary interest in a particular issue or organization. Successful public relations campaigns rely on a combination of demographic profiles, public opinion surveys, and focus groups to learn about their stakeholders. An in-depth understanding of the stakeholder’s lifestyles, preferences, and opinions helps to sharpen objectives, develop an appropriate strategy, craft specific messages, and choose the best ways to reach them.

For example, just as issues important to teenagers differ from those of citizens over 65 years old, messaging and communication vehicles also differ. Statistics show that older citizens read newspapers and watch television news in greater numbers than people in younger generations. Teenagers seldom, if ever, get information from a traditional newspaper and hardly watch television news. Rather, peer groups, social networking, and other Internet sites are the main sources of news and information for this demographic.

A public is like your family. You don't pick them; they just are—like generous Cousin Ezekiel and crazy Aunt Bertie. Publics may be helpful or annoying, friendly or not, but an organization must deal with them regardless. Publics exist because of their interaction and interdependency with an organization or because both they and the organization face a common issue.

—Smith 2009, 48

Figure 7. Examples of Target Publics

Note: each of the following audiences may be further broken down to reflect varying demographic, psychographic, or socio-economic factors and affiliations:

- Oppositional audiences
- Neighborhood associations
- Special interest/activist groups
- Minority communities
- Victims of crime (family, friends)
- Criminals
- Youth
- Parents
- Business community (small, minority-owned, largest, etc.)
- Faith community
- Nonprofit community
- Education leaders (public, private, higher education institutions)
- Elected officials
- City/county leadership
- Staff in other city/county departments
- Surrounding jurisdictions
- Civic and social organizations
- Law enforcement agencies (local, state, federal)
- Courts
- Attorneys (U.S., district, defense)
- Employees (sworn, civilian, command level, divisions, retirees, etc.)
- Unions
- Media (traditional, social, bloggers)

Within most stakeholder groups there are additional targets on which to focus. **Identifying and shaping strategies specifically for opinion leaders within the various groups can pay dividends. These are the people others look to for advice and guidance on issues.** What these opinion leaders say and believe carries weight within their circles of influence.

Formal opinion leaders are those who are in positions of influence because of their recognized standing—elected officials, corporate executives, and clergy, for example. Informal opinion leaders are recognized as such because they have knowledge and may be especially articulate in sharing their views—a parent of a crime victim, a member of a minority group, and a neighborhood association representative can all emerge as powerful informal opinion leaders. Both formal and informal leaders can exert considerable influence on public opinion and behavior and as such, the police are wise to invest time and energy identifying and developing relationships with them.

Assessing the relative health of the relationships the department has with its various target publics is useful, too, for it forces the police to think about the unique needs and expectations of key groups. Is it a supportive or adversarial relationship? Is there a history of working together or are there newcomers to the proverbial radar screen that demand attention? The more detailed the list and description of target publics (see Figure 7), the more precise the rest of the strategy can be.

### STEP 4: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Once goals and objectives are established and target audiences are identified, attention turns to strategy. While the plan as a whole is designed to be strategic, it also outlines specific communication/public relations strategies that, as Guth and Marsh (2012) describe it, “help you move from specific objectives to specific recommended action. Based on good research, a strategy is a general description of the kind and tone of action (tactics) you’ll implement to fulfill an objective” (p. 241).

Public relations strategies tend to force thinking toward general approaches, not specific tactics. **What types of considerations go in to developing communication strategies?**

- **Style of communication.** Would face-to-face meetings be best or would a multi-media method be preferable? One-way communication or community dialogue? Would direct communication from the department be more appropriate than relying on news media or other third-party sources to inform the public?
- **Tone.** Is shock and awe the right approach or would subtle and clever be more successful? Does the situation call for humor, gravity, emotional appeals, fear appeals, or straightforward informational messages?
- **Spokespeople.** Selecting the right person to speak on the right issue is a key strategic decision. There are times when a civilian spokesperson is most appropriate and other times when someone in a police uniform is the better choice. There are issues that should be addressed by the police executive or someone in the highest ranks of the department and issues that are best handled by division commanders or patrol officers. Thinking about who carries the message is an important part of any communication strategy.
- **Credibility.** One of the reasons companies use famous people as spokespeople for their products and services is because a prominent endorsement supposedly lends external credibility. It is not just the company that says the product is terrific, this famous “other” person says so, too. The same premise applies when commercials include “average,” person-on-the-street comments and interviews. The point is some issues lend themselves to using outside sources to reinforce the message. This is a decision based on an assessment of the department’s brand/reputation and how credible the community believes it is on any particular issue. With especially controversial or divisive issues, for example, a police department may want to consider building coalitions with individuals or organizations outside of the department that have more credibility with the target audience than the police may have.

- **Timing.** *When* to communicate is a strategic decision. The amount of impact and size of the audience desired dictates the best times of year, and even the times of the week and day, to make progress with certain objectives. Some issues have obvious timing considerations: back to school and holiday safety, for example. Other problems can be addressed following a specific incident. An objective to increase reporting of school bullying may have accompanying strategies designed to proactively address the issue at the start of school, for example, and reactively implement when a case of bullying occurs.

**If goals and objectives are the architectural drawing, strategies are the blueprints. They include considerations of what motivates a particular target audience, how they relate to an issue or concern, and what types of communication are needed to reach them.**

Using the example objective of increasing participation in a neighborhood watch, the research might indicate that face-to-face interactions with residents would be the best approach, and that timing efforts to peak in advance of the summer season would be beneficial—so residents could leave on vacation knowing their neighbors are especially vigilant and paying attention to suspicious activity.

In another scenario, using the example objective of decreasing larcenies from unlocked vehicles, research might indicate that a multi-media approach (print, audio, and video) with bold messaging delivered in advance of people engaging in unsafe behavior (i.e., leaving vehicles unlocked and items of value in plain view) has the best potential for success.

### STEP 5: MESSAGES

**A certain city attorney who is an especially skilled communicator once said, “I don’t care what I am talking about, I want the message to be, ‘Not a problem, under control.’”** Whether discussing a claim, explaining how a law or ordinance is interpreted, or talking about the circumstances surrounding a legal case, in each instance, the attorney made sure the words he chose supported this overarching message—that the city had things “under control.”

---

Figure 8. Crafting “umbrella messages” requires consideration of the following questions:

- Regardless of what you are talking about, what do you want people to know about the police department, its work, and its employees?
- What should people think when the police department comes to mind?
- What images of the police department do you want people to have?
- What is the police department’s reputation?
- How does the police department approach its work?
- How can the department emphasize its commitment to transparency, openness, and honesty while protecting the rights of individuals and the integrity of its investigations?

No part of a public relations plan is more important than clearly articulating the messages that help shape the reputation and the image—the brand—of a police department. These are not the messages specific to any particular incident, such as an officer-involved shooting, a neighborhood concern, budget reductions, or a crime scene. Rather, strategic messages are the umbrella messages—the guiding messages—that will serve as the core of much of the department’s communications (see Figure 8).

Messages should consider what the police department believes people need to know and what people say they want to know, which may be two different things. Not every informational desire can be fulfilled. Personnel files in most states are not public records, so despite how much people may say they want to know the contents of an employee’s file, it is not an information request that a police department can meet. Employees may want an explanation for a particular personnel action, but in many cases it is not something the department can legally disclose. Balancing competing interests is an ongoing challenge. The strategic plan can offer consistent guidance by emphasizing the department’s expectations for its communication. Long after the public has forgotten the specific content of a particular story or the details of an issue, what should they remember about the department and its work? Key messages should sum up the story the police want to tell. The tactics will provide the details and the “color commentary” in support of the key messages.

Messages are not only communicated with words. In fact, many people would argue that what is NOT said is as important as what IS said, and that how things LOOK communicates more than the words someone uses. When talking about strategic messages, then, it is not just about the clever arrangements of words. It is about aligning words with actions and making sure all of the elements of the work communicate a consistent message. Sloppily dressed officers, patrol vehicles that are chronically dirty, unreturned phone calls from victims or their families, lack of attendance at community meetings, and how people feel they are treated when interacting with the police—all of this matters. All of this says something about the kind of police department it is and what people should be able to expect from them.

- **A Police Brand.** In their article, *Branding Your Agency: Creating the Police Department’s Image*, Gary Margolis and Noel March (2004) explain that, “Each day, the police executive navigates a series of issues that has the potential to define the agency in a manner inconsistent with the actual mission, vision, and values of the department. How well the chief and the department handle these issues helps determine the department’s ability to obtain the public’s cooperation and support, to recruit the right people for the department, and to secure the budgetary resources to do the job” (p. 2).

A brand is not a logo. It is not a police department’s badge or the decals on patrol cars or a slogan. These symbols of the organization can be very powerful in conveying concepts of commitment and reinforcing a brand image in the minds of stakeholders, but they do not constitute the brand itself. The “golden arches” are not the McDonald’s brand. The promise of consistent food quality and taste, fast service, and affordable prices is. Apple, Inc.’s apple logo is not its brand. Its promise of performance, reliability, and innovation is.

**At the center of any corporate brand, then, is a promise—a promise of what an organization delivers and how people should experience it. For a police department, its brand is what defines its orientation to the work, the expectations its employees and citizens should have regarding that work, and how that work enhances their lives.** Brands communicate value and benefits. With policing and

other government services, citizens weigh what they spend in taxes against what they perceive they get in return.

At base, however, **police department brands involve citizens' feelings of safety and security.** The degree to which people are able to live without unreasonable fear of victimization is a central aspect to one's assessment of a police department's brand. The degree to which people have faith and confidence in the professionalism of the police also plays a role in a brand assessment. While messages about specific incidents and issues are often tailored to certain groups—politicians, citizens, employees, etc.—strategic messages should align with an articulated brand and have inherent consistency.

The best branding cannot overcome ineffective policing, community disconnect, or a poor record on matters of officer integrity. The best branding cannot make an organization into something it is not. If a brand is a promise, you either deliver on that or you don't. There is no faking it through. This is not to say strongly branded organizations never falter. Of course they do. Apple, Inc. had many problems with its iPhone, including the antennae band that caused poor reception or dropped calls, strange white spots on the screen, and scratches or

breaks in the supposedly scratch- and break-resistant glass face. Jet Blue, the airline known for providing a "human environment" and luxury features at a low-fare price point, had well-publicized and decidedly "inhuman" experiences when passengers were stranded on its airplanes for 10 hours or more without food and drink and in sight of the passenger terminals.

Organizations with strong brands have a "home base" by which they can judge their own performance and their customers can use to evaluate how it recovers from problems. Branding provides a beacon around which everything else revolves—every decision, every action. Any police department that has dealt with widespread corruption within its ranks, claims of excessive force, or racial profiling charges understands it is faced with the monumental task of rebuilding its brand. The police executive must respond with organizational and operational changes to rebuild the relationships damaged by a breach of trust. A strategic communication plan is uniquely suited to this task.

---

## The RCMP Brand

Margolis and March (2004) offer the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as an example of a strongly branded police agency. "What feelings, images, and thoughts do police officers and citizens' experience when they see a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer in a red dress uniform? Does the RCMP always get its man? The RCMP has created a strong brand identity. Canadians view their federal police force as a group to be respected, revered, and honored. They're seen as competent, effective, and extremely service oriented" (p. 4).

Part of the RCMP brand is the stories told about the officers and the work.

---

Stories of good policing should feature prominently in a department's communication efforts. So, too, should stories of community engagement and the work of residents that contribute to public safety. And if traditional news outlets will not or do not cover these stories, **as Boston Police Department's Communications Director Elaine Driscoll puts it, "Become your own news bureau."** Even agencies with little or no budget can self-publish and achieve sizeable audiences. Websites, Facebook, Twitter, agency blogs, community e-newsletters, and internal video resources can all be utilized to tell a department's story.

Storytelling is one of the most powerful rhetorical tools available to communicators. Facts, figures, and data are important but seldom make a compelling case and never without providing a context. Yet, all too often, police officers stand in front of angry and frightened neighborhood groups, trying valiantly to explain that the data about break-ins in their area are much lower than the rest of the city, or not much different than what they have always been. Or a department's monthly crime statistics are published without benefit of any narrative to explain the data, leaving journalists and others to interpret for themselves what is important and what gets highlighted or overlooked. "The missing ingredient in most failed communication is humanity" (Simmons 2007, 3). As Simmons explains it, "This is an easy fix. In order to blend more humanity into every communication you send all you have to do is tell more stories and bingo—you just showed up" (2007, 3).

**When wrapped up in stories, messages can support a department's brand in especially powerful ways.** As Fog et al. (2005) point out in their book, *Storytelling: Branding in Practice*, "At their most simple, branding and storytelling come out of the same starting point: emotions and values. A strong brand builds on clearly defined values while a good story communicates those values in a language easily understood by all of us" (p. 21).

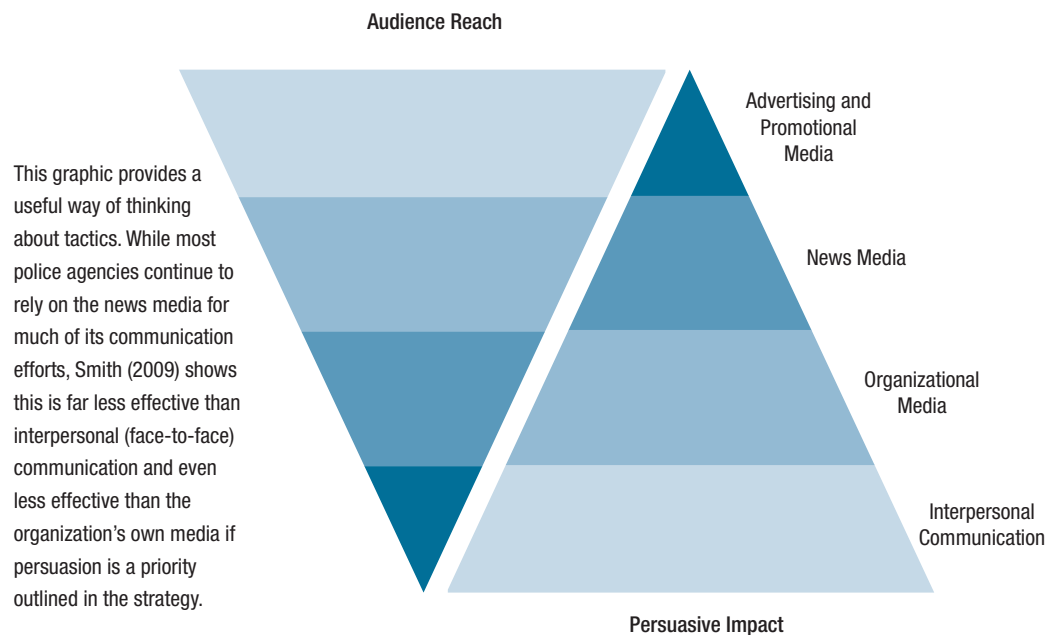
**A police department's messaging supports its brand while it supports its communication strategy. They are inextricably linked.** Key messages hone in on the essential idea or behavior a department is looking to create, reinforce, or change.

### **STEP 6: TACTICS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Once a police department establishes what it wants to accomplish, how it expects to accomplish it, and what it should say, the next step is to determine what methods to use to reach its target publics. The implementation phase outlines what is to be done, when, and by whom. The implementation plan makes clear who has the lead role, and what other roles and responsibilities are involved so nothing 'falls between the cracks.' If the strategy is the blueprint, tactics are the building materials and implementation is the building plan.

**Today's environment is rich with opportunity for a police department to tell its own story, to communicate directly with various target audiences, and to engage stakeholders in the business of public safety.**

Figure 9. Tactics Results



Source: Smith, R. 2009. *Strategic communication for public relations*. New York: Routledge.

No longer must a department rely on a reporter to tell its story. No longer must a department complain that its many positive stories do not receive coverage. No longer must a chief's response to a recent editorial go unpublished. Today, departments can cover themselves. And they should.

Consult any public relations book and one will find a veritable laundry list of potential tactics to employ. Chapter V of this toolkit provides greater details about all of the various tactics police departments should consider.

From a planning perspective, however, Smith (2009, 187) offers a way of categorizing the various tactics in terms of reach and impact that is useful for deciding what tactics to employ to accomplish which objectives (see Figure 9).

Interpersonal communication includes face-to-face interactions. Organizational media are the materials the department publishes or produces itself. Advertising media include paid (or donated) advertising in print (magazines, newspapers), electronic (television, radio, online), and "out-of-home" media including outdoor advertising (billboards), posters, and other signage. Promotional media refers to items imprinted with organizational messages or logos such as mugs, clothing, golf tees, and playing cards.

Once all of the elements are identified, organizing them for implementation requires three parts: **Assigning Responsibility**, **Detailing Budget Needs**, and **Developing the Schedule**. Presenting the tactical elements in a chart is useful for showing each of these pieces and how they relate to each other.



Table 2

Communication Opportunity	Community Forum
<b>Objective:</b>	To increase participation in neighborhood watch programs by 30 neighborhoods by the end of the fiscal year.
<b>Public:</b>	Neighborhood leaders (specifically, a minimum of 100 representatives of neighborhoods geographically and demographically representing each police district).
<b>Strategy:</b>	Attract residents who are opinion leaders in their communities to a face-to-face meeting with their assigned police district contacts and get in-person commitments from a minimum of 50 percent of attendees.
<b>Tactics:</b>	Invite neighborhood leaders to community forum. Use invitation (postcard) from chief of police, follow up with e-invite (or hand-delivered) from district commander, and phone calls to those who have yet to RSVP. Provide refreshments and a police department gift (mug, decal, or other small item) to incentivize attendance.
<b>Budget:</b>	\$1,500 (assumes meeting location secured at no cost and refreshments are confined to drinks and snacks).
<b>Evaluation:</b>	Attendance figures; follow up with neighborhoods to organize programs, number of neighborhoods that complete the process.

Source: Data original to this report and compiled by co-author Julie Hill, Ph.D.

Table 3

Task	Lead	Deadline	Budget
Secure date and send appointment to internal staff	Carol	4/1	N/A
Secure location	Carol	4/6	Prefer location without usage charge; \$500 max
Compile mailing lists	Divisions	4/19	N/A
Order gift items	John	4/22	\$600
Design invitation (electronic and print versions)	Donna	4/25	N/A for in-house design; \$225 printing
Send invitations (e-mail and print)	Marilyn	5/15	N/A for e-mail; \$250 for regular mail
Follow-up calls	Divisions	5/25	N/A
Order refreshments	John	5/25	\$400
Presentations, brochures, pens and paper, name tags	Carol	5/28	\$150
Room set up	Marilyn	6/1	N/A

Source: Data original to this report and compiled by co-author Julie Hill, Ph.D.

Another way to show the flow of the plan is to outline how each element works together. Table 2 on page 53 relates to a Community Forum.

Once the overall idea is set, an implementation plan breaks the tactics down to show what has to be done, who will take the lead on accomplishing the work, when it is to be complete and how much money, if any, is earmarked for the task—as the example in Table 3 on page 53 shows.

The more detail one can put into the implementation plan, the more likely it is that the work will be accomplished and no important steps are overlooked.

Most police departments have modest budgets—if any at all—for public relations activities, so funding a strategic plan can be seen as a major hurdle. It does not have to be. Many tactics, such as revising web copy, updating social media, providing training, and sending e-newsletters can be accomplished with existing resources and no additional funding.

Other tactics do require some financial investment and some may be substantial. Outdoor advertising, video production, professional graphic and printing services, and event catering can seem cost-prohibitive. Before abandoning elements of the plan because of costs, consider ways to pay for them outside of an existing operating budget. **Some ideas include:**

- Asset forfeiture funds
- Grants
- Contributions from other organizations and businesses (goods and/or services)
- Partnerships with media outlets
- Sponsorships by local businesses, civic groups, and related organizations
- Work with a local school, college, or university to develop materials as part of a project
- Use resources available through the city or county public information offices

Paying for different elements of the plan is only one part of the budgeting challenge. Having the necessary personnel to develop and implement it is another. Engaging people at various ranks and from different divisions of the department is a way to temporarily assemble the people needed to do the work. Even if the public information staff is sufficiently large enough to handle the work, it is beneficial to involve others in the department who have the interest and skill, so that buy-in to the strategic approach begins well before the plan is unveiled.

### **STEP 7: EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT**

**Measuring results of a public relations campaign has been a long-standing challenge for even the most seasoned communication professionals.** A 2003 study of campaigns submitted for the Silver Anvil Award competition—the Public Relations Society of America’s prestigious award that recognizes the very best in strategic public relations planning and implementation—underscores this point. The study revealed that most entries still only present results in terms of numbers or amounts of work done (numbers of stories or meetings, for example) instead of measuring outcomes based on the changes in attitude or behavior that the program was designed to target (Ahes 2003).

There are some good reasons why measuring results of public relations efforts is problematic. Public relations activities are impacted by and interact with all sorts of factors. A meeting expected to draw a large crowd gets a surprisingly small turnout because it was raining. A goal to decrease larceny from auto by encouraging people not to leave anything of value in their vehicles coincides with the arrest of a major ring of thieves. The survey to evaluate citizen satisfaction achieves a poor response rate. Despite best efforts, it can be difficult to pinpoint why something did or did not occur, what outside influences might have played a role in the success or failure of an initiative, or how much credit should be given to a communications campaign as opposed to an operational change.

Similarly, some areas of communication that may be critically important, like social media activity, lack accepted effectiveness measures. How should a blog be evaluated for effectiveness? What is the measure of a successful police department website? Researchers and practitioners have begun to look to measures of “engagement” as a way to evaluate these new media tools. Engagement is variously defined to include such things as number of visits, time spent per visit, number of items visited, amount of feedback provided, and the extent to which people share the content with others (e.g., re-tweeting and posting on Facebook) (Smith 2009).

Putting even basic measures in place is important because it forces a focus on results, not process or outputs. Improving the quality of measurements begins with making sure the objectives are expressed in measurable terms and an understanding of what information needs to be available to make the evaluation. If an objective is to “improve citizens’ perception of safety by achieving a 5 percent or more increase in satisfaction with police services,” there must be both a starting benchmark and a way to assess whether the increase was achieved. Typically, this would involve statistically valid and reliable surveys on both ends of the process. If there is no starting benchmark, the objective could be written to establish one: “To achieve a rating of 70 percent on a survey to gauge residents’ perception of safety in their neighborhoods.”

Whatever type of evaluation is planned, it is wise to **build in checkpoints for progress reports along the way instead of waiting until the end of the year to measure results. These mini-evaluations enable the department to make adjustments** to its plan as conditions warrant. If the major ring of thieves responsible for a large percentage of larcenies from auto is arrested, the public relations objective and tactics can be revised to reflect this.

**Flexibility is vital to any plan.** New conditions will develop that the police must address, a change in leadership may cause new priorities, and some issues may dissipate. The ability to adapt a plan to accommodate environmental changes is a mark of a strategic enterprise.



## The Morning Conference Call

*Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey schedules a conference call with his command staff every morning. The purpose of the call is to go over significant events from the day before, and discuss what is coming up that day and over the next few days.*

*The Communications Director always participates in the call. Part of the conversation is devoted to developing story ideas and the messages for those events that are likely to attract news media interest.*

*The morning conference call serves an important operational purpose and, at the same time, reinforces the importance of thoughtful communications with everyone on the call.*

---

## CHAPTER IV— The Chief/Sheriff (CEO) Role in Effective Communications

**The CEO sets the tone for the way the organization communicates with both external and internal audiences.**

The chief or sheriff, as CEO, must be an effective communicator themselves, understand when they should be speaking for the organization, and know that they are responsible for ensuring the organization has developed the processes for effective two-way communications.

Over the past 5 years we have seen more agencies develop strategic communications plans to ensure that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, and to thoughtfully take advantage of the growing number of tools to help enhance the communications process.

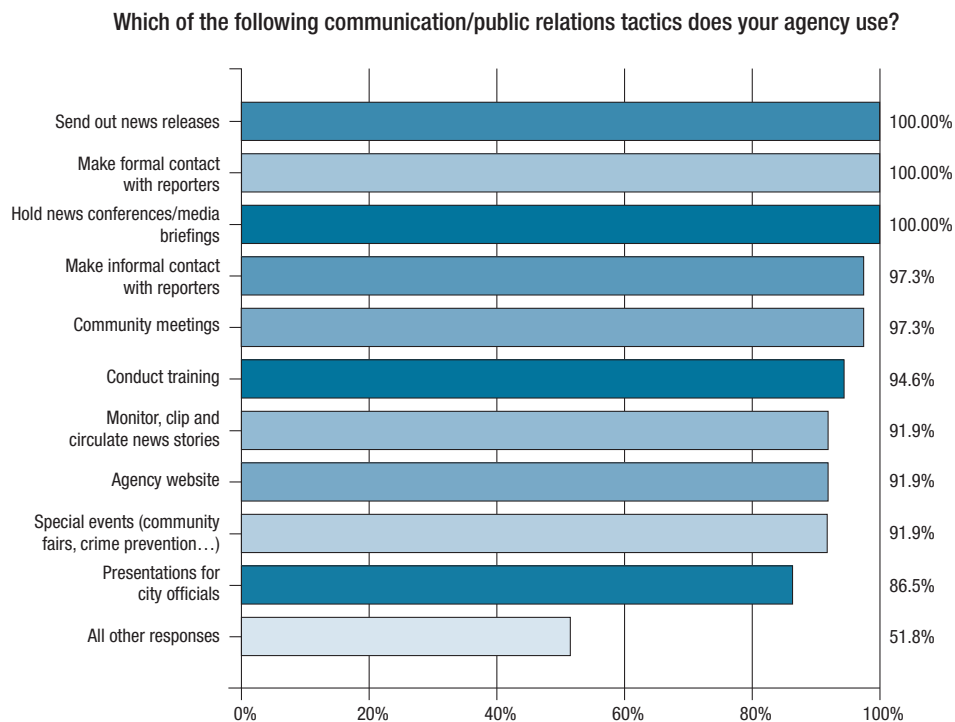
**An important responsibility of the CEO in setting the tone is modeling the behavior that he or she expects of personnel in the organization at every level.** The CEO must also ensure that the communications plan is supported by the appropriate level of staffing and resources. This chapter will focus on the role of the CEO in creating the environment for effective communications.

## THE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

**A survey of Major Cities Chiefs Association members, conducted as a part of the development of this toolkit, revealed that 55 percent of those responding did not have a strategic communications plan** even though their departments routinely used a wide variety of methods to communicate with external and internal audiences (see Figure 10 on page 58).

Why would this be the case?

Figure 10.



Source: Data original to this report and compiled by co-author Julie Hill, Ph.D.

One reason most police agencies have not developed a communications plan might be out of a belief that a plan is not needed. They all have policies that provide guidance to employees on who is authorized to speak to the news media, under what circumstances and, in many cases, what they can say to the public. Many police executives believe the combination of well-established policy and procedures and a continually evolving set of tactics are sufficient to address the organization's communications needs and see little need to develop a formal plan.

Proponents of communications planning see things differently. They certainly would agree that policies and a range of tactics are important, but argue they are not enough to ensure the organization is effectively reaching its external and internal audiences. They would argue that avenues people have for accessing information have increased so much that the shotgun approach to dissemination is no longer adequate to effectively connect with the people the police need to reach.

Chapter II paints a clear picture of the dramatic changes in how people obtain information in today's wireless world. It tells us that newspapers and evening news continues to lose readers and viewers as they migrate to the Internet and cable television for what they may perceive as the most up-to-date news. The chapter describes the exponential growth in the use of the social media to inform and be informed. It also tells us that demographic profiles vary with the information sources they use.

These changes, and others, underscore the need for thoughtful and focused communications efforts. While a plan may not have been necessary five years ago, today's environment and the future demand that organizations have a plan that guides, coordinates, and evaluates communication efforts. The CEO is the person in the organization that must ensure that a communications plan and strategy is developed, resourced, and maintained.

### MODELING THE BEHAVIOR

The CEO's leadership is crucial to creating an environment in which command and other personnel in the department are sensitive to the importance of communications. If the CEO is open and candid during media encounters others will be more likely to follow in that pattern. If the CEO encourages and supports the use of the social media as communications tools the department will be more likely to make effective use of them. If there are barriers placed on the department's use of such tools, or limitations on its expansion of the website, the CEO must address these issues with the city/county managers. If the CEO routinely takes advantage of the public affairs staff's expertise in thinking through framing the messages, then others in the organization are more likely to do the same. If the CEO stresses the need for the development and implementation of a communication plan, the department will have a guide for continuous improvement in this area. In ensuring effective communications there is no substitute for an active and engaged CEO. That is not to say that the CEO is always the person speaking on behalf of the organization. Careful thought should be given to when it is most appropriate for the CEO to be the spokesperson.

### THE CEO AS COMMUNICATOR

As the organizational leader, the public, politicians, and employees expect to hear from the CEO on important issues and it should be understood that each time the CEO speaks there are many different audiences. Law enforcement CEOs work in a world in which nearly everything that happens is important to someone in the external and internal audiences. They must make choices on what issues they will be the spokesperson, and how they will communicate. Some examples of areas where those choices will have to be made are noted below along with the questions that should be considered.

## High Profile Incident:

### Planning Meeting

Many police departments have begun to hold meetings to think through the communications strategy for high profile incidents.

These meetings generally occur before the first major announcement about the incident.

The primary focus of the meeting is to:

- Frame the Message
- Develop Objectives
- Calm Fear
- Seek Help
- Correct Misinformation
- Identify Audiences
- Decide Who will Speak
- Determine the Method(s)

Meeting participants should routinely include the CEO, Public Affairs, Legal, and key commanders.

Additional participants are determined by the incident. For example, in an officer involved shooting, a union leader and someone from the Mayor or City Manager's Office would be good choices.

Some departments will also engage key community leaders before any announcement is made.

### CRIME

Departments routinely release annual UCR statistical reports and many report them on a monthly basis. Because of strong media and community interests, departments tend to release details on incidents that result in death, serious injury, or significant property loss. **When should the CEO speak for the department on issues involving crime? When annual statistics are released, or just on high profile incidents where there is significant community interest?** Clearly, when the CEO serves as the spokesperson it increases the significance of the announcement in the eyes of the news media.

### ARRESTS

Arrests of individuals involved in crimes where there is wide spread community interest are often announced at a news conference. What are the situations when the CEO should make the announcement or participate in some way?

### USE OF FORCE

Increasingly, police agencies and their executives are confronted to explain videos of officers using force that have been played on news stations or YouTube before an investigation is even underway. Effective communications in a controversial shooting or other serious use of force situation is critical. Who should speak for the department? When should the CEO take on that responsibility and in what arenas? Just with the news media? Should the CEO be the primary speaker at community meetings and gatherings? These situations can evolve into a crisis for the department and demand that careful consideration be given to communications decisions.

### DEATH OF AN OFFICER/SERIOUS INJURY

These are always high profile situations that compel the department to provide information on what caused the death or injury. They require well-coordinated internal and external statements. Family notifications are critical and need immediate attention to minimize the chance they will hear about the incident from some other source. It is an area in which it is common for the CEO to be heavily engaged in the communication process and be involved in the initial announcements. **Departments should have current communication procedures for these incidents that identify the steps that should be taken and who is responsible for ensuring the procedure is implemented.**

Employee communication is particularly important—in the confusion inherent in dealing with these incidents, incorrect information is often conveyed. **Care must be taken to ensure that employees have the basic information as soon as possible.**



### MISCONDUCT

Actual or alleged misconduct on the part of officers is another area where careful consideration has to be given to the timing, content of the message, and the method of delivery inside and outside of the department. State law, union agreements, and local custom all influence what information can and should be provided. Misconduct on the part of an employee can contribute to a loss of community confidence if the communications process is not handled with great care. The involvement of the CEO in making statements depends on the seriousness of the misconduct or if there has been a spate of incidents within a relative short time frame. **In matters of public trust the CEO is almost always the best spokesperson. The CEO is in a position to take responsibility for what has happened and let the community know the steps that will be taken to address the issue.**

### POLICY

New policies or changes in policy that affect service or community expectations should be publicized as much as possible. The CEO may want to be involved in the initial announcement on significant changes in areas such as pursuit, use of force, or adopting new tools like conductive energy devices. For the most part, the general public will not have a great deal of interest in policy changes unless they sense a connection to them personally. Departmental personnel will generally be in a position to determine what audiences will be interested in a particular policy change. When possible, it is always a good idea to engage those in the community who are likely to be interested in the policy prior to making a change.

The CEO also has to be mindful of those who have some expectation of being informed before the news media and public. This is a difficult challenge for both the CEO and the communications staff. The mayor, city/county manager, and local elected officials want to know about significant issues before they see them in the news or before they get a call from a reporter looking for a comment. Employees also want to know about events that affect them before the general public, because they want to be in a position to answer questions they get from people they know in the community.

To the best extent possible, the process for meeting these expectations must be developed in advance. Who will the CEO notify? The CEO should take the responsibility for notifying the mayor and city manager if at all possible. Who is responsible for notifying the elected officials? If it is not done by the mayor, manager, or their staff, will that be the responsibility of senior command level personnel in the department? Will they receive telephone calls or be notified by e-mail? Employees are even more challenging because of the number of them and, at any given time, the majority will not be working. Who is responsible for notifying employees? When will they be notified—just before the media release or news conference? Or simultaneously?

The CEO must also give consideration to the methods used to communicate with external and internal audiences. When is it most appropriate to inform external audiences through a news conference, a media release, a series of individual interviews, a posting on the website, or through e-mails? Should more than one tactic be used? Employees have an expectation that they hear about important issues from the department before information is released to news media. Employees are agency representatives and to the best extent possible, internal notifications should be a priority, not only because it demonstrates their value, but because it arms them with the necessary information they need to effectively represent the events to others.

The method obviously has to take into account the situation; when time is short, an e-mail is the most likely form of initial communication with employees. As time and circumstances permit—a video, employee meeting, or a visit to roll call briefings might be the most appropriate. The method obviously depends on the circumstances and should be selected based on its potential to effectively reach the audiences in a way they understand the communication. Thinking through these issues in advance helps minimize mistakes in a crisis or high stress situation.

### THE CEO AND THE COMMUNICATIONS STAFF

Communication has become increasingly more complex and important to law enforcement organizations. The organizational placement of the function and the access of key staff to the CEO are central to a coordinated and effective communications director. Most agencies have the function directly reporting to the CEO or one step removed. **It is clear that the communications director must have direct and frequent access to the CEO even if that person is not a direct report.**

**There must be sufficient confidence to allow for candid conversation with the CEO, including advice on dealing with communications issues.** Communications personnel are usually responsible for writing drafts of news releases and statements for the CEO and department. They frequently help prepare the CEO and others that will be speaking for the department by asking questions they anticipate might be raised. To be effective in fulfilling these tasks, the PIO must have enough contact with the CEO to anticipate the key points on most issues.

In the same way the staff supports the CEO and department—the CEO must support the communications staff to ensure they have access to needed information and to be confident they will have support when controversy arises over communications issues. That support comes in many ways—**making sure communications personnel are present at discussions on issues that may have communication implications is an important step in ensuring that people in the department know the CEO places a great deal of significance on communications.**

## RESOURCING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

There is a wide variance in the staffing levels of public affairs units in major city agencies. Sixty percent of the departments responding to our survey have less than five people assigned to this function. Twenty-eight percent assigned between six and ten people, while 10 percent had more than ten people in this function. What is the appropriate level of staffing? Like many areas of policing—it depends. It depends on the type of work public affairs does. If the function is designed just to deal with the news media, the staffing levels will be different than those that manage the website or do writing and report publication for the department. **In large cities it is very difficult to see how the communications function can be effective with only one or two people on staff. In most cities it does not have to be staffed 24/7 but it should have sufficient staffing to have someone available to the news media and departmental personnel 16 hours a day to cover the primary news times.** It is the responsibility of the CEO to ensure the function has an appropriate level of staffing to meet job expectations even when facing internal criticism for devoting resources to a non-operational function. The importance of the communications function to overall department operations is not always understood or appreciated. For more guidance on establishing public information offices and staffing, see the earlier COPS Office publication, *Key Leadership Strategies to Enhance Communication*.



*Every communication may be considered an opportunity to contribute to the organization's strategic objectives.*

---

---

## CHAPTER V – Communication Tools

The police have an enormous number of communication tools available to them. They range from the one-on-one conversations employees have with people every day to the sophisticated high-tech methods of reaching a large number of people in a matter of minutes. Making use of the variety of tools and using them at the appropriate time contributes to the overall strength of the communication effort. Communication is not a one-size-fits-all process. While a news release might once have been a dependably effective law enforcement communication tool, continued reliance on it as the predominant method of disseminating information means an agency is missing the mark with large numbers of its important stakeholders. This chapter will identify and discuss a number of tools the department may incorporate into a strategic plan and help to ensure the tools are not overlooked when thinking about improving communications with the community and employees.

### TRADITIONAL TOOLS

#### THE NEWS MEDIA

The news media have been the primary method that police have used for many years in their efforts to inform the community about incidents and overall departmental activities. Although the media have been rapidly changing and evolving as described in Chapter II, they continue to be an important communications tool that can be used to effectively reach targeted audiences. The news media are a vehicle for a number of different approaches to getting information out to the community. Some of the ways to use the media include:

#### WRITTEN RELEASE

This is one of the most common methods that police agencies use to inform the public about incidents that have occurred and internal departmental activities that are considered of interest. When should a department use this tool? It is certainly not practical to prepare a release for everything that happens in the department or a community. It is most often used when a serious crime has occurred (such as a homicide), when an arrest has been made on a high profile crime, when the department wants help in solving a crime, or to warn the public to take precautions. It is a useful tool for these and other situations in which informing the broad, undefined segments of the community is the goal. Some agencies have taken the typical release a step further by putting it on their website at the same time as it goes to their news

media list. They have also developed e-mail lists of people who have signed up to get this information—these community leaders, politicians, and key government officials receive the release at the same time as the news media. This is helpful in several ways. First, the media rarely use all of the information in a release, so the e-mail list and those connecting to the website receive all of the information the department believe they should. Second, the people on the e-mail list have an opportunity to get the information before it comes out in the media. Third and perhaps most valuable, these stakeholders can share the information among their own networks, extending the reach of the department’s unfiltered message even further.

### NEWS CONFERENCE

Although not used as frequently, the news conference is a good way to release information on high profile incidents so that all interested journalists are receiving the information at the same time. For some incidents the conference is carried live on television and/or streamed online so anyone watching it has the opportunity to hear directly from the person speaking for the department. The decision to hold a news conference is one that should be based on the seriousness of the incident, importance of the information to be conveyed, and the value of the media receiving the information at the same time.

Consideration also must be given to who will speak at the conference, what background information should be provided in addition to the release, and who will be made available for one-on-one interviews following the conference if a decision is made to allow them. Conferences can be an overused tool—one indicator of this is that few members of the media show up for the conference, or an outlet may send only a videographer instead of a journalist. However, savvy communicators take good advantage of these situations by turning the event into exclusive coverage.

Amateur and professional bloggers alike have found their way into news conferences and onto media distribution lists, adding a new dimension to how information obtained from an in-person meeting is disseminated. Not necessarily bound by a journalist’s code of ethics or behold to any expectations that news and editorials are separate pieces, this evolving group of “watchers” are presenting unique challenges for departments. Many agencies try to exclude bloggers altogether by narrowly defining the term “media” while others have opted to embrace bloggers as part of the media corps. Whether bloggers are bonafide journalists is a point of ongoing debate, some of which is being argued in courts of law, with varying results. Unless and until these muddy waters are cleared with some definitive judgment, it is wise for the police agency to carefully consider its stance on providing bloggers with access to conferences and other media-focused activities. The reality is some bloggers have enormous influence and substantial audiences.

## OP-ED PIECES

It is often helpful to the public for the department to respond to news or editorials in the media when it is believed further clarification is needed or the department's perspective was not well represented. The challenge with these pieces is completing them quickly and getting them published or aired in sufficient time for the public to make the connection. At times, writing an op-ed piece may not be wise because it reminds or makes the public aware of a story they missed. When used appropriately, they can be very effective at reaching the people who regularly read the editorial and opinion pages of the print media. Many departments are simply bypassing the media by placing responses or issue papers on their web page or blog and sending the information directly to key stakeholders via e-mail and to people who have subscribed to receive department information.

## NEWSPAPER COLUMNS

Some agencies have officers who write regular columns for newspaper publication about crime prevention, events going on in the department or community, or to feature an employee's work. With the information that departments have on their websites and other new tools, this has become less common in daily newspapers. It can be an effective tool in the weekly community papers that target certain areas, non-English speakers, or special interest groups like senior citizens or parents. Many communities have Spanish newspapers, radio, and television, and they provide a great opportunity for regular contact for the police with their audiences.

## RADIO/TELEVISION TALK SHOWS

Every day there are hundreds of hours of talk shows on both radio and television. They provide an excellent opportunity to reach the audience that these shows target. In most cases, departments respond to requests to appear on these shows—often when something of general interest is going on or when there is an issue of particular interest to the show's market.

## Messaging Through the Radio

While the days of radio station newsrooms fully staffed with announcers and street reporters have largely fallen victim to the axe of media budget constraints, that does not mean police agencies and their chief executives cannot effectively communicate with captive drive time audiences. In fact, radio is a largely untapped resource ripe for selective messaging.

Through on-line research of Arbitron or another radio station ratings service, one can determine the most listened to stations in a city and their formats. Forming a relationship with program directors and show hosts can pay real dividends when you can turn to them to help minimize rumor and inform citizens about a significant law enforcement issue or investigation. Some chiefs pay in-studio visits with a top rated morning drive time announcer(s) once or twice a year just to talk about current affairs. Once the relationship is formed, a chief will likely be very well received if, on occasion, it would be helpful to "call in" to a program and set the record straight regarding events of the day. A live radio appearance is much more than a 15-second sound bite and allows for broader, more detailed views. It also allows citizens to hear the "human side" of the chief.

—Don Aaron, Public Affairs Manager  
Nashville, TN, Police Department

The invitations need to be given careful thought—the host and their point of view are particularly important when thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of appearing on the show. These shows do provide an opportunity to reach an audience with the department’s perspective on the issue, and shows with call-in segments enable dialogue most other media outlets lack. They may also be appearances the department decides to seek out when the particular audience is difficult to reach in other ways or when the chance arises to set the record straight.

There are certainly downsides to appearing on these shows. At base, talk radio shows are more entertainment than news. They have an agenda and structure the interview to fulfill that agenda. Statements made in the past are used in an entirely different context. Individual sound bites are extracted and aired repeatedly in an effort to fuel controversy, embarrass an individual and reinforce a contrary point of view.

### RESPONDING TO REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

**An on-going challenge for the police is to determine how they will be able to effectively respond to the myriad of requests for information and comment from the news media. Although the number of reporters in print and television news media may be shrinking, the demands for information continue to increase.** There are fewer newspaper and television reporters but the news outlets for which they work have expanded coverage into competitive online sites and, for television, more newscasts throughout a day. Traditional deadlines do not apply. Add bloggers, activists and average citizens into the mix of those who request information and records and the already enormous task of meeting demands of expanded coverage can be daunting.

While a few departments have added public information personnel to cover more hours of each day, most agencies task patrol supervisors or watch commanders with serving as the media’s point of contact when public information staff are not on duty. Others use their websites to provide call log and significant information that is frequently updated. Requests for records—including available videotape, 911 calls, reports, e-mails, financial documents, personnel information, etc.—add to the workload, especially if a reporter, assignment editor, or even an average citizen makes the request to more than one person in the department. Especially in larger organizations, it is not uncommon to discover that two or more people are working on the same request. This area is the source of a good deal of the tension between police and the media and requires a well-defined process for how to handle any records requests.

### COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS, SPEECHES, AND MEETINGS

Police department personnel constantly interact with various groups throughout the community at neighborhood meetings and while making speeches and presentations. Some of these events are high profile with media coverage, but most involve only the department representative and the members of the group. These interactions with the community increased significantly with the advent of community policing and, although not at the



same level, continue with such great frequency that there may not be much thought given to them other than to make sure that someone attends on behalf of the department. Although officers are reluctant to attend some times and these interactions do not actually reach large numbers of people, they leave lasting impressions about the department with people who are likely to be among the most engaged because they *are* at the meeting. Just sending “someone” may not hurt, but it will not take full advantage of the communication opportunity. **Some points to consider:**

- What is the purpose of the meeting—issues and problems, a community update, a question and answer session?
- Who is the best person to send to the meeting? The beat officer? Supervisor? Commander? A specialist? Who can best serve the purpose?
- What message does the department want to convey in addition to addressing the meeting purpose?
- How are officers prepared for the meeting? Are they in a position to answer the questions asked and comfortable with saying they don’t know the answer?

Formal speeches by the chief or other command level personnel are normally given thought and preparation—the questions noted above are applicable in these circumstances as well. What does not normally happen without a communications plan is using each and every opportunity in front of an audience to reinforce important messages the department wants to convey to the public and even internally.

Crime statistics are necessary elements in many presentations, whether from the officer working in a neighborhood or the chief in a community speech. It will be noted that crime has increased or decreased during some comparison time frame and credit will be taken or shared depending on the circumstances. The speech will move on from there. If the department’s policing philosophy is community policing or problem solving, each time crime statistics are discussed—whether they are up or down—it is an opportunity to remind the group of the importance of their role in crime reduction and community safety. It’s a chance to mention one or two of the things they can do that would help reduce their potential of being a victim and help lower the crime rate. If not a crime reduction message, what other important messages need to be conveyed? Consider educating people on the department’s policing approaches, explaining new policies, and ways of solving non-crime-related community issues as additions to crime reduction messages. Too often the community meetings, presentations, and speeches are not given the attention they deserve as a means of delivering broader messages to the community.

## REPORTS

Most police departments produce a series of reports that address a variety of issues—some are annual and others are more frequent. Although a traditional tool, they can provide very valuable information to those in the community (and outside) who have an interest. In recent years the delivery methods have changed—the reports are often available on the department’s

website, which increases the circulation and reduces the cost of printed copies. Website availability is a positive change because it makes the reports more widely available for longer periods of time and there are more options for color, charts, photos; even video and interactive elements. As a part of an overall communications plan these reports can play an important role in developing a consistent message to the community and employees.

- **Annual Reports.** Annual reports have long been a part of providing updates on departmental activities to the political leaders, community, and others. Most are largely statistical reports that include crime data, workload statistics, and administrative information such as budget, staffing, and employee demographics. They also often honor officers lost in the line of duty, include promotions, and present news on other significant organizational events of the past year. In recent years some departments have used the annual report to highlight the important contributions of citizens or employees in the organization by telling stories about their work. Through the stories the department is able to show a more human face and emphasize partnerships and areas that would not receive any attention in the typical statistical reports.

We have seen some departments stop producing these reports because of the costs associated with them—particularly print costs. The higher printing costs wouldn't allow them to be printed in the numbers required to reach a broad segment of the community. The web page publication option may help address this issue, but questions remain about how many people in the community would seek the report out on the website. Visibility of the annual report has caused some—Vancouver, British Columbia, and Seattle for example—to design the report so it could be published as an insert in the Sunday newspaper. This approach puts several hundred thousand annual reports out into the community.

- **Internal Affairs Reports.** A significant number of departments have adopted the practice of producing annual reports on internal affairs activities. The reports often provide data on the number of citizen complaints, internal investigations, investigative outcomes, and disciplinary action summaries. Some include information on use of force and vehicle pursuits. The IA report is not of wide interest but it does serve as a useful source of information for political leaders and those in the community with concerns about police misconduct and accountability. The reports are very helpful when a high profile incident occurs in the community and the news media is looking for information. They also reinforce the department's commitment to transparency.
- **Statistical Reports.** Most agencies routinely produce statistical reports on crime, traffic, calls for service, arrests and other types of data that show workload. In some cases these are a part of the local government reporting requirements, while in others it is the departments' practice. Many of these reports have or are being replaced by frequent updates of the statistics on the agency's website. One challenge departments must resolve is providing a context and explanations for what the numbers mean. It is important that as these data are shared that consideration be given to whether or not it requires some explanation and if so, how that will be accomplished.

- **Public After-Action Reports.** High profile events or incidents often require more detailed information and explanations than can be provided in news conferences and accommodated by the news media. Departments often prepare or employ a consultant (ostensibly to provide some independent viewpoint) to review these situations and prepare a report that can answer as many questions as possible about the situation as well as provide the department's perspective. The Seattle Police Department recently took a different approach to respond to criticism of an officer involved shooting. The department completed its investigation and then asked for a peer review that was conducted by homicide detectives from the San Diego, California, and Austin, Texas, police departments (Diaz 2011). Although it is difficult to determine if the review enhanced the credibility of the Seattle PD's investigation in the eyes of the critics, it was an approach that demonstrated they were open to having someone from outside the department review their work—an approach that should be considered by others even when there is no public criticism.

Another example of a department using an after action report to demonstrate transparency was when then LAPD Chief Bill Bratton ordered a review of the MacArthur Park May Day, 2007 disturbance (Bratton 2008). The department's 124 page review of the incident was circulated widely and placed on its website for anyone to read. The report acknowledged that the LAPD could and should have done a better job in planning for the demonstration as well as with command and control once it was underway. To help regain the community's trust they also followed through with the changes recommended in the report.

These reports can be valuable tools for change within the agency as well as a helpful approach in letting the community know the department is open to change.

## NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters are an old standby for informing both internal and external audiences. They are used primarily to provide regular updates on the organization—new programs, project progress, an employee's or citizen's contributions, and news about employees. The question is whether the time and effort that goes into producing a newsletter is worth the investment. With e-mail as a transmission tool the cost of printing and mailing is no longer a factor, but it still requires a commitment of resources to produce the newsletter. Many organizations continue to use newsletters and believe they provide valuable information to those who are interested in updates about the organization. Figuring out whether it is worth the time or whether some other vehicle, such as a blog, Facebook site, or informal e-mail, could be used to share this information is a key consideration of a communication plan. In all cases, skills in writing the copy and laying it out in a way that catches the reader's eye are paramount.

### BROCHURES

Brochures are a tool that can be effectively used to focus a single well-crafted message to the targeted audience. The police have used them for many years to provide information on everything from employment opportunities to crime prevention. Brochures or flyers can be produced somewhat inexpensively and can be placed in locations where they can be easily accessed. Officers can also carry them in their vehicles for distribution at appropriate times and locations. To extend the use and reach of the material, it can be made available on the department's website. Like all information intended for public consumption, the department must also invest in making it available in the languages most common in their community.

Most departments have brochures on a wide variety of subjects. It is important to make sure they are up-to-date and contain accurate information. A thorough review prior to reprinting will ensure the material is current and determine whether it needs a significant redesign or other changes.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

The "FAQ" is a tool that has been around for many years because it can be a very effective method of communicating with the public. The most useful FAQ covers subjects that draw the greatest inquiry and presents information in a highly readable, succinct format. Every department should prepare a list of FAQs and regularly update them. A well-planned and well-worded list of FAQs can be one of the agency's most powerful marketing tools. It is inexpensive and effective. Some agencies may want to establish more than one list of FAQs to address different topics. Separate lists of FAQs may focus on administration, operational practices, staffing, grants and special programs, agency readiness, partnerships, and other topics of interest.

#### **Questions that might be considered for the list include:**

- How do I contact the department in a non-emergency?
- How do I find out what is happening with my case?
- How do I get a copy of a police report?
- Who do I call if a relative or friend has been arrested?
- How do I get someone from the department to attend or speak at our neighborhood association meeting?
- Who do I call if I see a problem recurring in my neighborhood?
- How do I get someone to conduct a crime prevention survey of my home/business?
- Is it true that some uniformed officers I see in the community are working for private businesses? Is the community safe? Is my neighborhood safe?

- Is it safe to drive, shop, and recreate in my community at night?
- What are the chief's or sheriff's priorities? What is the basis for these priorities?
- Is the community safe? How is this determined? What are the indicators beyond basic crime statistics?
- What is the department's current budget?
- Who is in charge in the absence of the chief of police or sheriff?
- What outreach programs (small business program, crime prevention surveys, child safety seat program, and police athletic league) are sponsored by the department?
- How many officers and civilian employees are in the department?
- How many officers does the department need?
- What is the difference between the number of personnel allocated and the number actually employed?
- How many officers are assigned to neighborhood patrol (the number of officers working beats with responsibility for handling calls for service)?
- How many officers are assigned to task forces and specialty units?

Each list should only include 10 to 15 questions that focus on providing helpful information to the community.

## CABLE TELEVISION

**Sixty-five percent of the Major Cities' Chiefs responding to a survey indicated they are involved with the production of videos for municipal television programming**

(Stephens 2011). Some of these shows are primarily host interviews of officers or people in the community. Others include news segments supported by video from the field or short productions of 5 to 10 minute features on some aspect of the department. These shows air several times a month on different days and times to provide multiple opportunities for viewing. Many of these shows are also available on demand through streaming video on the department's website and/or YouTube page.

Police departments are also teaming up with cable television stations to produce reality shows that feature officers on patrol, specialty units, and more recently a focus on women in policing. "COPS" (FOX) is the longest running show of this type followed by "America's Most Wanted" (FOX). There are now many similar offerings available to those interested, including A&E's "The First 48" which focuses on homicide investigations, and, more recently, "The First 48: Missing Persons." A new show called "Police POV" focuses on mid-size police departments. It features video taken from cameras worn by officers as well as material shot by a professional videographer. Others of this genre are decidedly more evocative. "Party Police: Wild on the Water" (Court TV) is a particularly apt example.

## Austin Police Use Electronic Media to Track News Stories

The Austin Police Department (APD) recognizes local media's important role in informing the public regarding the work of APD, relaying critical information on specific cases, and creating awareness of all APD units, operations, and initiatives. APD utilizes two electronic media (TV) monitoring services to track and monitor local stories: Snapstream, and TeleClip News Monitoring.

Snapstream: APD has used this Houston-based software company for more than four years. This program saves news stories up to two weeks from the initial television airdate. In addition, the service allows APD to:

- Monitor television media stories
- Record, search, clip, and archive local and national news stories from our desktop computers and save to our hard drive or burn onto a DVD
- Keep copies of stories in criminal case files that may garner media attention

The clips are then used as investigative tools in active cases.

TeleClip News Monitoring: Through the Teleclip system, APD's Communications Office receives a daily chronological listing of local news headlines. This tool allows APD to see exactly how much time was dedicated to a local news story and how often that story appeared.

Through effective media monitoring, APD is in position to spot local reporting trends, identify issues of importance to specific reporters or stations, and track which police-related stories or issues are garnering the most attention.

—Anna Sabana, Communications Director  
Austin Police Department

Although these cable television shows have been on the air for some 25 years, they continue to be controversial. **Many police executives believe they are a valuable tool for educating the public on what life as an officer on the street is all about as well as the complexities of policing. Others argue that editing and compressing a week of filming into thirty minutes significantly alters reality and does not present policing in a realistic way.** They say that officers and detectives on these shows begin to “play to the camera” and act differently than they would if the camera was not there.

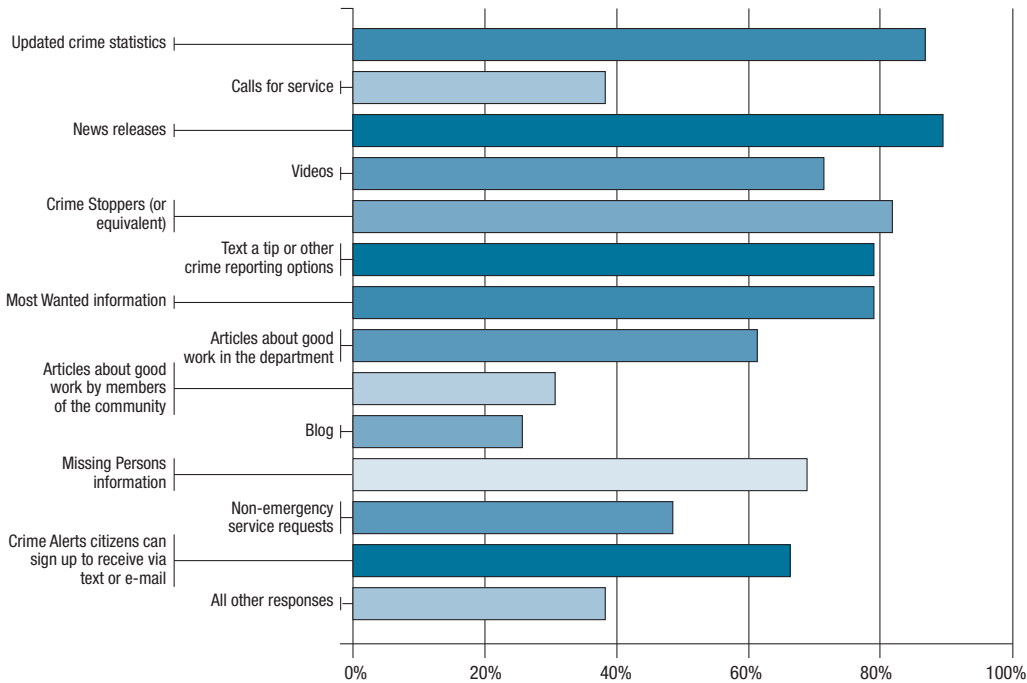
The community, political leaders, and prosecutors are as divided about these shows as the police. There have been some tragic situations filmed in the production of these shows. In Detroit, a seven-year-old child was killed in a police raid when a filming crew was present and the incident ultimately cost the chief his job. To minimize the potential for things going awry, police chief's must carefully weigh the benefits and the costs of using television reality shows as a way of informing and educating the public.

## THE NEW TOOLS

**The “new” communications tools are about technology and the increasingly social nature of news and information sharing.** Technology has given new life to some of the traditional tools that have been used for many years and enabled people to easily share information with social networks. Communicating with the department's external and internal audiences has always been critical to successfully achieving organizational goals.

The new tools present both challenges and opportunities in the communication process. On the whole however, the opportunities greatly outweigh the challenges.

Figure 11. Website information from police departments that responded to the survey



Source: Stephen, D. 2011. Survey of Major Cities Chiefs Association Members. March.

## DEPARTMENTAL WEB PAGE

The most lasting impressions of a police agency continue to come from those interactions that people have with the department's personnel. They are on the street, answering phones, and dealing with citizens around the clock.

The agency's web page is now an important part of that 24/7 presence and can also leave visitors with either a positive or negative impression. These sites continue to increase the amount and type of information for visitors. **Figure 11 indicates the top responses from Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) agencies for information contained on departments' websites.**

In addition, respondents identified some 14 other types of information maintained on their sites. When an employee leaves a positive or negative impression, it impacts the person and probably their family and friends. A department's website can leave good or poor impressions with thousands of visitors.

The web page is one of the most important methods of communication at the department's disposal and may evolve into the most important way of connecting with members of the community and employees. As such it requires the attention of the chief or sheriff and other command level personnel.

## Milwaukee Police — “For the Record”

The Milwaukee Police Department shares the frustrations of all law enforcement when an erroneous story is printed or aired in the media. For the most part, we all dismiss it as a part of the job and move on.

We decided to take matters into our own hands—or, rather, our website—when we began a column titled, “For the Record.” There, we cite the incorrect story and then we correct the record. In the case of MPD, we were on the bad end of numerous news stories that contained erroneous reporting on our police radio system. As we all know, the big story with the wrong information gets the play and the correction is buried.

We corrected the news story on our site by writing the facts, posting a link to the Chief’s news conference where the correct information was shared, and then we posted a link to the “For the Record” item on our Facebook and Twitter accounts. We also went to the “comments” section of the news outlet and posted the link to our site there. Additionally, we used the city’s E-Notify service to get the word out by creating a press release on the existence of the “For the Record” column.

*It has become a public shaming for the media to be included in “For the Record.”*

...and, for the record, we think that's okay.

—Anne E. Schwartz, Communications Director  
Milwaukee Police Department

From humble beginnings as static pages, websites have evolved to enable departments to interact and share information with constituents in increasingly creative and meaningful ways. The very nature of the Internet demands that sites be constantly updated to provide visitors with new content. Regularly take a critical look at your department’s web page: Does it meet your expectations? Does it leave the impression of your organization that you want to convey to visitors? One does not have to be an expert in web design to determine if the site represents the organization in a way that is positive and professional.

### A few things to consider in reviewing your site:

- Is it attractive?
- Is it easy to navigate?
- Is the information clear and easy to understand?
- Is the content up-to-date?
- Is there a “search” feature?
- Is contact information easy to find?
- Is there a site map?
- Is the site appropriately interactive?
- Do the images convey the right message for the department?



There are obviously many questions that can be asked about the web page, but these non-technical questions can be helpful in ensuring the site presents both the image and information that is important for the department. The most effective websites are interactive in nature and allow the organization to further its business activities by allowing visitors to file reports that might otherwise require an officer be dispatched or someone to handle it over the telephone. They allow visitors to answer questions that might otherwise require the department to handle it in person, which might require waiting until an office is open or in a queue on the telephone. Not only are communications enhanced, the site provides citizens with a convenient and cost-effective way of interacting with the department.

## BLOGGING

An International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) survey on social media in September, 2010, revealed that 5 percent of the 728 responding agencies maintained a blog. About 25 percent of the major cities have a blog on their websites. Although blogs are very much a part of the news and communications tools in today's world, the police have not been as quick to adopt them. They do require some work and maintenance but offer a direct unfiltered opportunity to communicate with people interested in police issues on a regular basis. **One of the early adopters of a blog was Chief Tom Casady from Lincoln, Nebraska. Since 2007 Chief Casady has posted on his blog hundreds of times. The posts range from praising officers, to responding to citizen concerns, to weighing in on important public policy matters.**

## Monday, July 26, 2010

### The Illegal Dilemma

Illegal immigration is an incendiary issue in the United States these days. Last week, I was correctly quoted (mainly) in a short news article that summed up a two-hour meeting I attended with the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee. Partly through my own ill-chosen words, and partly through the filtering process that distills a long meeting into a few paragraphs, I felt as though my remarks and opinions were mischaracterized. I'm not blaming anyone but myself, though, I am just trying to clarify.

The Committee asked me to explain what our practice was regarding notifying Immigrations and Customs Enforcement when an illegal alien was arrested or contacted.

I explained that the fingerprint record of the arrest was submitted to the Federal government, as prints have been for decades. In this particular case, the record matched an ICE database record on a person who had overstayed her visa by more than 8 years. The existence of these databases, and the rapidity with which such comparisons can be made makes these kinds of matches much faster and more likely today than in the past. We hadn't gone out of our way to bring the weight of the Federal system down upon her at all—she merely was discovered by ICE in the ordinary course of business. We did our job, ICE did theirs, and that's the way it is supposed to be.

—Posted by Tom Casady at 5:59 AM, 46 comments  
<http://pd304.blogspot.com/search/label/Whines>  
 (excerpt from longer post)

## Tuesday, February 16, 2010

### Could be worse

We are in the process of preparing our budget for the 2010-2011 fiscal year. The budget cycle lasts almost nine months these days, and it's not exactly a time of joy and mirth. We have had a couple lean years in municipal budgeting here in Lincoln. Sometimes it is good to look around and consider the positives, though. We have not lost any positions, and in fact we were able to add four officers to our complement during the current budget year by virtue of a stimulus grant. All in all, Lincoln is doing pretty well compared to the rest of the nation, as evidenced by *this article* in last Friday's Wall Street Journal.

—Posted by Tom Casady at 5:21 AM, 21 comments  
[http://lpc304.blogspot.com/2010\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://lpc304.blogspot.com/2010_02_01_archive.html)

## Tuesday, April 28, 2009

### Budget consequences

Today, the Board of Police Commissioners adopted a \$175 million general fund budget for FY09-10. This budget is \$15 million short of what we would have needed to continue operating the department at 08-09 levels. This meant we had to make some hard choices, and try as we might, there will be an inevitable impact on public safety. There has been much talk that this budget will not take officers off the street. Put simply, that's impossible. No officers will be laid off, but attrition will reduce numbers.

A loss of officers will be felt immediately on June 1 when we must take 18 of them off the street to staff detention units at the patrol division stations.

Send comments to [kcpdchiefblog@kcpd.org](mailto:kcpdchiefblog@kcpd.org)

—Posted by Chief Corwin at 4:45 PM

A sampling of posts is included here.

The posts of July 26 and February 16 gave the Chief an opportunity to talk about important public policy issues, address questions, and provide his perspective.

In another case of effectively blogging to provide insight into an ongoing budget debate, Kansas City, Missouri, Chief Jim Corwin provided the community with information that was not being adequately addressed in the news media. Chief Corwin has been blogging since 2009 and has hundreds of posts on a wide range of issues. (See an excerpt from one of five posts on the budget controversy: <http://kcpdchief.blogspot.com/search/label/budget>.)

**Blogging has its challenges to be sure, including monitoring and handling comments readers post on the site.** These have to be monitored to ensure that appropriate language and decorum is maintained on the site. There also has to be frequent posts so that interest and a following are maintained. In both of the examples above the chiefs have actively maintained the blog and they are now a source of information for the community and the news media as issues are discussed in the public forum.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Obviously, the new tools include social media, and in many ways these present the most interesting and productive communications opportunities. Social media are user-created web-based postings in a variety of different forms that allow multi-directional conversations and exchange of information. With an estimated 500 million users, Facebook is the top social media network in the world followed by MySpace, Twitter and LinkedIn. Social media newcomer, Google+, which launched in 2011, is expected to pass LinkedIn and Twitter within a year (McMillan 2011).

Law Enforcement has slowly begun using the social media as a communication tool.

In October 2010, the International Association of Chiefs of Police in a partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance launched their Center for Social Media website to provide information and assistance to agencies interested in exploring the use of the social media as a part of their communications plan: [www.iacpsocialmedia.org/](http://www.iacpsocialmedia.org/)

This website offers a wide range of support including model policies, facts about social media, and many examples of how agencies are using this new tool. **The IACP survey revealed the following (IACP 2010):**

- 81.1% use social media
- 66.8% have a Facebook page
- 35.2% have a social media policy
- 23.2% are in the process of crafting a policy
- 61.6% of agencies not using social media are considering its adoption
- Resource constraints were the most cited barrier to social media use

**The Major Cities Chiefs Survey had similar results:**

- 74% are using Facebook
- 77% are using Twitter
- 65% are using YouTube
- 15% are using Flickr
- 3% are using MySpace

**An important question for the chief or sheriff is how social media fits in the overall communication strategy for the department.** Are they used to send a certain kind of message or to reach a specific demographic? Or is their purpose just to connect with friends or followers, whoever they might be? Are they used as investigative tools? To find suspects? Are they used to provide opportunities for public feedback? Is the goal to get as many followers and friends as possible? How do you know that the investment in the social media is worth the effort?

## POLICE DEPARTMENTS USING FACEBOOK

Many police departments have established Facebook pages and use them in a variety of ways. Much like early websites that contained only static, non-interactive content, many chose not to activate the feature that allowed citizens to post replies and other material to the sites. Of course, this goes against the grain of what social media is all about. Today, a check of these same pages shows most have taken the plunge and begun two-way exchanges with “fans.”

Content on the pages vary. Some departments only post fairly innocuous and generally positive content—departmental awards, crime prevention tips, and information about special events. Others have used Facebook to feature wanted suspects, missing persons, and noteworthy crime summaries, while still others post information about wanted suspects and current crime information, much like a Watch Commander’s log.

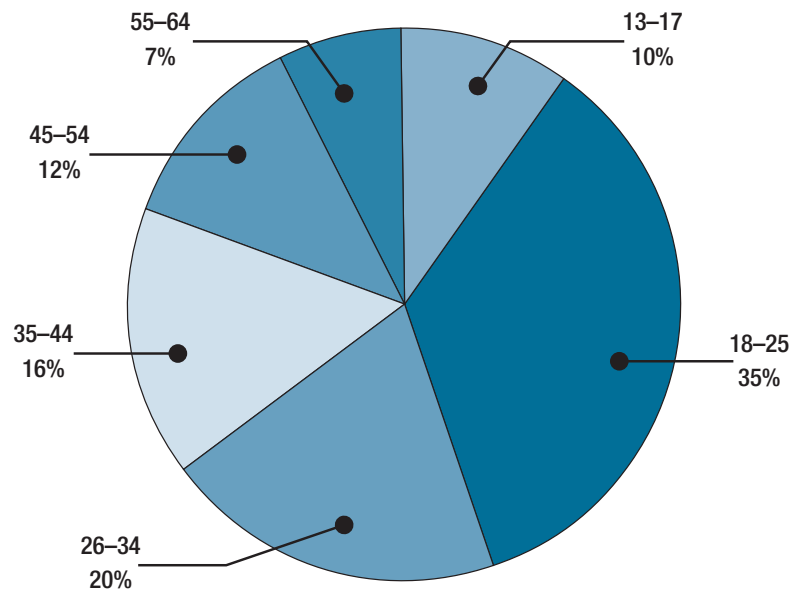
### FACEBOOK Page sampling from September 2010:

DEPARTMENT	FANS
Houston PD	17,481
Kentucky SP	22,515
Chicago PD	12,649
Virginia SP	20,261
NYPD	20,646
Rolla, MO PD	3,413*
Marion, IN PD	3,937*
Bangor, ME PD	3,767*

(\*Population under 32,000)

Note: Even a page for the Philadelphia Police Department that had NO CONTENT, except for a message that the site was under construction, already had 26,134 fans.

Figure 12. U.S. Facebook Users by Age—3/1/11



Source: Facebook Demographics Revisited – 2011 Statistics  
<http://socialmediatoday.com/kenburbary/276356/facebook-demographics-revisited-2011-statistics>

In thinking about how social media channels might fit into an overall communications strategy, the demographics of the social media user and the traditional consumer of the news media should be taken into account. We know from information presented in Chapter II that the average viewer of the evening network news is 62.3 years of age. We also know the average newspaper reader is 55 years old, white, and male.

Figure 12 shows that of the millions of Facebook users—only 7 percent are above 55 years of age.

Although this continues to change, it seems clear that if we want to reach a more mature age group, the newspaper is still probably a better way than Facebook. It is also clear that it may be an effective tool in connecting with the 18–34 age groups. The key is to use the tool that is most effective at reaching the target audience. If the audience includes the entire community then the news media, along with the social media, will provide the best chance of reaching the most people.

**Although Twitter use has developed more slowly, police departments have also built a following using this tool** (see Figure 13). The most effective applications of Twitter are to send out emergency alerts (traffic accidents, missing children or elders, etc.) and to drive traffic to an agency’s website for more information.

As noted earlier, 65 percent of the major cities use YouTube with 25 percent posting on the site weekly. Departments post recruiting videos, crime prevention messages, warnings, and public service announcements. For some, it is an important part of the overall communication strategy and reaches an audience with an unfiltered message they may not have the opportunity to see in any other way.

Figure 13.

**Police Departments Using Twitter\***

<b>Department</b>	<b>Followers</b>
Boston	15,963
Baltimore	8,872
Seattle	5,914
Toronto	6,847
San Francisco	2,782
Richmond	3,277
Epping, NH	1,389
Milwaukee	4,755
Dallas	2,761
Denver	3,436
Juneau	1,173
Boynton Beach, FL	2,095
NYPD	5,996

\*Accessed September 10, 2010.

Source: Data original to this report and compiled by co-author Julie Hill, Ph.D.

The Houston Police Department regularly uses YouTube to reach its community. A posting about their SWAT team has had over 36,000 views. Another posting on the department taking a look at a new police vehicle design attracted over 25,000 views.

A different side of social media sites is dealing with information that is posted that may not be so flattering. The tape of an officer's encounter with a skateboarder in Baltimore has been viewed over 6 million times. The NYPD officer's encounter with the Critical Mass Bicyclist has been viewed close to 3 million times. Other videos showing police encounters and use of force can hit the Internet before police officials are even aware of the incidents. To be sure, the communications planning process needs to give some attention to how to deal with these situations prior to the time they emerge. When should there be a response? Who will respond? How will the department correct misinformation or explain the situation from a police perspective?

## BOSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT—ONLINE VIDEO

The Boston Police Department (BPD) proactively uses video messaging to communicate with constituents in a variety of ways. It is an effective way to provide the community with unfiltered public safety messages. These messages can also re-broadcast by media outlets without the requirement of a traditional news conference. There are currently multiple online technologies available to law enforcement that are both effective and economical. The BPD has its own channel on YouTube which allows its users to upload and share videos. Our YouTube channel is updated weekly with various public safety announcements, surveillance videos and department-related news. The BPD also has a weekly cable show which is uploaded to YouTube as a means of increasing its viewership and reaching the Internet community.

In addition to YouTube, the BPD has created a channel on an Internet service known as Ustream.tv—a technology that allows live streaming Internet TV. Ustream.tv provides an interactive video broadcast platform that allows anyone with a video camera and an Internet connection to broadcast a live TV segment without cost. Ustream.tv is a very effective tool for police to provide an immediate broadcast on breaking news such as motor vehicle accidents causing traffic delays and 'Be On The Look Out' advisories regarding suspect or vehicle descriptions. The system can be used to provide information more quickly than a traditional news conference and can also be simultaneously streamed over your department Facebook page.

The videos produced by BPD are also made available on the department's news blog. Both YouTube and Ustream.tv provide 'embed codes' which allow the video to be placed directly to a website or a blog. Videos and interviews produced 'In-house' are an excellent way to deliver a message to the community that has not been edited and contains more than a sound bite to constituents. Media outlets have the option of re-broadcasting your department's video. Don't forget to brand your video with your department web address or blog site to drive additional viewer traffic.

—Elaine Driscoll, Director of Communications  
Boston Police Department

## E-MAIL

E-mail has become one of the most frequently used methods of communicating with both internal and external audiences. It can reach large numbers of people in short order and provides the opportunity to connect with people before or immediately following a news story that may not include your perspective. It also has its critics who argue there is so much meaningless e-mail and spam it has lost its effectiveness as a communication tool. Critics argue that many people just don't read most of the e-mail they receive.

Others point to the increasing popularity of text messaging as a replacement for e-mail. Still, while e-mail continues to enjoy mass saturation, realize that there are merits to the criticism of e-mail, and that it is not a panacea—just a tool that when properly used, can be of value as an additional way of communication.

To increase the potential of messages being read and to minimize annoying people with unwanted e-mail, many departments have developed programs that allow readers to *sign up* for receiving e-mail messages. Commercial websites such as Nixle have been developed to provide this service to police agencies.

**There are some basic points departments and individuals should remember in using e-mail:**

- It is most effective when the messages are relatively brief
- It is NOT confidential
- Organizations should have written policy on e-mail use
- Not all messages get delivered to the intended recipient—make sure the address is correct
- It does not replace the need for face to face conversation
- Reprimands or counseling should not be done on e-mail
- Make sure the “reply to all” choice is appropriate
- Ensure that everyone understands the retention (e-mail storage) policy

As with all communication tools, the chief or sheriff should give thought to where e-mail fits into the overall communications strategy. It certainly has a place, as it can play an important role in providing direct communication opportunities with employees, elected and appointed officials, and members of the community.

Although viewed by many as an impersonal tool, e-mail can facilitate one-on-one contact with employees and citizens and allow for ongoing exchanges. It can also be the tool that supports the idea of an “open door” policy if the CEO is willing to take the time to respond, or ensure there is a response, to e-mails from employees.

## Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department (LASD)

### Texting – An Important Messaging Tool

As we wade through the incredible opportunities and challenges of new media, the most talked about eCommunications systems are websites and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Even though there have been dramatic improvements in smart phone capabilities and there is rapid growth in smart phone ownership—31 percent at the end of 2010—the majority of Americans don’t have smart phones yet. (Nielson Wire 2011)

So, if someone wants to view our messages, they have to wait until they get home or to work. This is certainly a limitation if you want to send urgent messages about evacuations, Amber alerts, or warnings about a man with a gun on the run.

Some 30,000 to 50,000 people have registered so far to receive e-mail messages directly from the LASD. Interestingly enough considering the cell phone studies, 60-70 percent of subscribers have also registered to receive our urgent text messages.

Our goal is to reach the maximum number of people with our balanced (and sometimes urgent) messages. The best way to accomplish this is to use the systems the public uses. When given the choice, the public does indeed want to receive text messages.

One recent illustration is when a brush fire broke out in northern Los Angeles County in 2010. Although the directly affected burn area only threatened about a hundred homes, the fire was located along the important 5 and 14 freeway interchange. To be able to quickly provide updates via texts, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department publicized a Nixle “short code.”

To receive the relevant texts, the public needed only to text CROWNFIRE to the short code number 888777 (as if it was a phone number). During the 2 1/2 days of the fire, 5,000 people opted in. We heard from many people that thanked us for the messages but we also heard they wanted more.

Thousands of other policing agencies across the country are using e-mail/text as well, including the LAPD, Long Beach PD, and Arcadia PD in Los Angeles County. It is a tool that should be a part of the communications plan of every department.

—Mike Parker, Captain, LASD

## San Diego Police—Nixle

The San Diego Police Department began using the Nixle Community Notification Service in April 2010. Since that time, the program has been used extensively to notify the public of crime series, missing persons being sought by the police, traffic congestion and roadway hazards, and community events, such as marathons and parades. In the future the system will be used to notify the public of high surf warnings, flooding, and to assist in evacuations associated with wild fires that periodically plague the city.

Nixle is a web-based community information sharing service that allows the public to receive text and/or e-mail messages regarding crime, safety, traffic, and community issues. The service is free to the community; members wishing to receive the information alerts simply register on the Nixle website to join. In addition to individuals, Neighborhood Watch groups, community organizations, and business groups can receive these valuable notifications.

Nixle notifications can be customized to suit a variety of needs. Although generally text-based, the notification can also include up to four photographs and a map, if appropriate.

As our first venture into the social media world, we have been very pleased with the results and feedback we have received from using Nixle.

—Lt. Andra Brown  
San Diego Police Department

## WIKIPEDIA

Wikipedia is a free Internet encyclopedia that is written collaboratively by volunteers. Anyone can submit an entry as well as change and add to the information as they please. From the Wikipedia website:

*Since its creation in 2001, Wikipedia has grown rapidly into one of the largest reference websites, attracting 400 million unique visitors monthly as of March 2011 according to ComScore. There are more than 82,000 active contributors working on more than 17,000,000 articles in more than 270 languages. As of today, there are 3,669,614 articles in English. Every day, hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world collectively make tens of thousands of edits and create thousands of new articles to augment the knowledge held by the Wikipedia encyclopedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>, accessed June 28, 2011).*

Many police departments have Wikipedia sites and the site will often be among the first results from an Internet search. It is an Internet resource that police agencies need to pay attention to, if for no other reason than to make sure the information is accurate. Some departments use Wikipedia as an additional resource to tell their story. The Boston PD and Houston PD have well developed pages on Wikipedia that provide information on their history, organizational structures, and much more.



## COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Police agencies have invested in a variety of programs that are designed to notify members of community emergencies and current events, and in some cases individuals will sign up to receive information disseminated by the department. Programs like *Reverse 911*, *tip411*, *Citizen Observer*, and *Nixle* have created a range of new or improved opportunities to reach the public and should be given some consideration as a part of the overall communications plan.

No doubt the future will bring new communication tools and better ways of using the tools that have been available for many years. **To stay abreast of changes departments will have to continually evaluate the effectiveness of communications efforts and find the tools that work best with their communication strategy.**



*“What ensued in the following month was in many ways as remarkable as the shooting itself. Within that month, three town meetings were held, an internal affairs investigation was completed, discipline was imposed, new policies were written and implemented, training was reevaluated, equipment was inspected, and nine of the ten deputies apologized to the community about the shots that they had felt constrained to fire on that Compton residential street” (2005, 1).*

*—County of Los Angeles Office of Independent Review*

---

## CHAPTER VI—Crisis Communications: Planning and Execution

**On May 9, 2005, freelance videographers captured the unfolding drama of what quickly became known as the “120 shots” incident in Compton, California (Vargas, 2008).**

Deputies with the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department had pursued a vehicle believed to have been involved in an earlier shooting. They cornered the vehicle on a residential street. When the deputies attempted to take the suspect into custody, the suspect began backing up his vehicle and deputies began firing. Eighteen seconds later, approximately 120 shots had been fired. Four struck the suspect, one struck a deputy in his vest and many penetrated walls of nearby residences (Vargas 2008). The suspect, who survived his injuries, was later determined to have been both unarmed and uninvolved in the earlier shooting.

Video of the shooting dominated local and national news coverage the next day. Interviews with residents in the neighborhood and images of the damage to the homes struck with bullets were prominently featured alongside the dramatic footage.

The event itself is noteworthy as an example of a crisis for a law enforcement agency, but it is hardly the only example of incidents involving law enforcement agencies that could be considered crises. **Seldom does a day go by when there is not a report of some department under fire.** Nor is it the only example of a law enforcement agency handling a crisis openly and directly. Still, how Sheriff Lee Baca and the deputies handled the situation makes this case especially valuable in any discussion of crisis communication. Even the County of Los Angeles Office of Independent Review acknowledged this in their official report of the incident. Vargas (2008) offered a similar assessment:

*What made the incident unique in law enforcement crisis communications was the response of Sheriff Lee Baca and the involved deputies to the incident. Both Sheriff Baca and the involved deputies expressed regret for the shooting and publicly apologized. In a news conference arranged by the deputies and their attorney, terms*

*of regret were expressed to the community. Dr. Samuel Walker, a noted researcher into issues of police accountability stated, “The apology to the community by the officers involved in the incident represents an unprecedented step in terms of acknowledging the impact of police actions on affected communities (Walker 2005, 2–3).” This view was also expressed in headlines from the Los Angeles Times, “Sheriff’s New Tactic on Shooting: Contrition; Baca’s reaction to the Compton barrage deflected anger and surprised activists” (Banks & Winton 2005).*

*The response by the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department was carried by all local newspapers and television stations. It was also broadcast nationally by most television news channels. Rarely has apology and contrition been used to such an extent within the law enforcement community as a means of crisis communications. The apology itself became the major theme of the news coverage (p. 7–8).*

### CRISIS AS OPPORTUNITY

The best, most brilliant public relations strategy will not make up for making a poor operational decision and poor communication can make a bad situation worse. However, when poor operational decisions are made, a good communication strategy can help to

“Crisis management is the enterprise of telling ugly truths.”

—Consultants Eric Dezenhall and John Weber (2007, 3).

minimize further damage and aid recovery. Looking at crises in terms of situations or turning points helps explain why the actions police departments take and the words spoken matter so much. A law enforcement agency is unlike a public or private corporation, a not-for-profit, or even most other governmental agencies. Law enforcement has power and authority that exceeds most other entities, and with that power and authority comes a level of public accountability that is often higher than what is expected from most other organizations. While laws do identify public records, some of the most important information agencies have to share is not a matter of public record. While the police have both the responsibility and obligation to provide information, there is great debate over how much should be shared, when, and with whom. The choices one makes depend on the overall strategy and how an agency approaches fulfillment of essential responsibilities to maintain both public order and public trust.

**Disaster is not the pre-determined result of a crisis.** In defining crisis, Fearn-Banks (2007) uses the phrase “potentially negative outcome,” not “*certainly* negative outcome.” Seeger et al. (2001) use the word, “threaten,” not “devastate.” Interestingly, the Chinese symbol for crisis is interpreted as “dangerous opportunity.” Not all crises end in disaster or result in irreparable harm to the organization or people involved. In fact, it is possible to emerge from a crisis stronger and with a more positive reputation than an organization enjoyed prior. The key is in how the crisis is managed, damage is controlled, and what the people involved say and do.

How, when, and where the ugly truths are told and by whom are the decision points that make the difference between the crises that are handled well and those that are handled badly. Advance thinking about how to deal with the most difficult events provides executives with an invaluable perspective without the crushing press of a crisis. Determining in advance that the police department intends to confront situations with openness, transparency, and speed will guide decision-making when time is short, tensions are high, and public safety and/or public trust is threatened.

“It matters less what was done than how it was disclosed.”

—*Author Unknown*

**The police operate in a world dominated by emergencies and crises.** Every day, officers, crime scene investigators, telecommunicators, and dispatchers deal with individuals involved in critical incidents of various sizes and varying scope. Of particular concern for this toolkit are those events that spell potential crisis for the agency itself. Employee misconduct or malfeasance, officers who commit crimes, unwarranted or extreme use of force, controversial shootings, serious errors in crime scene search or evidence analysis, mishandled 911 calls, questions of tactical or investigational competence, claims of racial profiling, inadequate or excessive police response to an incident, and “cooking the books” in reporting crime statistics are the kinds of situations that can destroy a department’s reputation, damage relationships with employees and members of the community, result in a loss of public trust, and cost people, including police executives, their jobs.

Historically, police agencies have well-earned reputations for sharing less information than others believe they should. As Wexler et al. (2007) point out, it was not that long ago that “deny, justify, and stonewall” was the typical police response (p. 48). “Full disclosure of errors and a transparent effort to correct them can strengthen bonds with the community and clients, while efforts to deny responsibility or to cover up a problem will breed distrust and disrespect” (Wexler et al. 2007, 48). Police agencies are certainly not alone in their aversion to full disclosure. Books and news archives alike recount case after case in which embattled people and/or organizations chose to say little or nothing while details of the events, and a lot of unrelated but damning material, piled up around them.

Worse still are those who chose to try to lie their way out of a bad situation. From Bill Clinton, Tiger Woods, and Anthony Weiner to Hewlett Packard, BP Oil, and Toyota, it is all too common for people to withhold, obfuscate, and deny, and for the rest of us to be left wondering, “What were they thinking?”

**People have great capacities to forgive bad behavior, but deception is another matter.** And yet, time after time, people and organizations choose this perilous course, perhaps out of the belief (or hope) that “no one will find out” or “this, too, shall pass.” Inevitably, however, the truth emerges and in its wake are left the remnants of reputations, relationships, and careers that took years to build—and yet took only poorly chosen words and timing to undo.

The list of people who have gotten in trouble because they withheld information is much longer than the list of people who got into trouble for sharing too much information.

To be sure, the police deal with many situations and events that require discretion and argue against full disclosure. The police have legal obligations to protect certain information, such as personnel data (depending on individual state laws), and must weigh the benefits of sharing information against concerns over investigational integrity or creating public panic. These situations should not be taken lightly.

**Adopting a posture of openness, transparency, and speed does not mean departments are predisposed to share information indiscriminately.** Rather, it redefines the starting point for the decision-making process. Taking the position that information will be shared unless there are legitimate reasons to withhold it is a very different beginning posture than assuming information will not be shared unless there are legitimate reasons to provide it. Even when the wisest course of action in a particular situation is to share very little substantive information, there is still considerable opportunity to say *something*.

As Barton (2008) states, “Even very seasoned and talented professionals can find a way to mess it up” when it comes to the most basic of crisis communication principles:

*“When in doubt, act quickly, tell your public what you know and don’t know, and over-communicate at every step of your decision-making process”* (p. 37).

Think of your communication approach as options along a continuum. (*Note:* lying is not on the scale). On one end, there is silence or “*no comment*.” On the other end is “*full disclosure*.” Between these poles are a range of options, any one of which is arguably a better choice than silence. Examples of some options include:

- Explaining why information cannot be provided
- Explaining why information will not be provided
- Discussing the investigatory process
- Expressing concern for involved parties
- Affirming principles to which the investigation will adhere
- Identifying a future point at which additional information will be available (including, if applicable, in court)
- Releasing documents, video, or photos related to the case in question (either ahead of any public records requests or as a result of requests; releasing the material broadly, such as posting on the agency website, or releasing only to the requester are additional strategic options to consider)
- Issuing a public statement in writing only (again, there are additional options here; posting it on an agency website says something quite different than e-mailing it only to media outlets)
- Delivering a public statement in a formal setting such as a meeting of elected officials

- Delivering a public statement in a news conference setting, taking no questions
- Delivering a public statement in a news conference setting and taking questions

Each of the above options is preferable to ignoring the mounting story, and several could be employed throughout the course of an incident. For both internal and external crises, there is a common denominator: **How the police handle the incident, disclose information, talk about the case, and behave in the wake of the event is absolutely critical.**

*“Communication should not merely be involved in communicating decisions about risk and crisis after they have been made. Rather, risk and crisis communication is most effective when it is part of the decision process itself”* (Seeger 2006, 236). The strategy underlying crisis management is vitally important. The information provided is but one element of the strategy. Who delivers the information, how and when the information is communicated, to whom it is provided, and whether opportunities for stakeholder interaction make sense are all factors to consider when developing the strategy.

## WHEN CRISIS STRIKES: STRIKE FIRST

**Whenever possible, speak first. It is the offensive, proactive position,** which is almost always preferable to the defensive and reactive position. Framing the issue is the advantage that goes to the party that speaks first. It is a strategic and tactical mistake to give this offensive position away to those who will use it to attack, criticize, and blame.

Since opponents will undoubtedly attack, criticize, and blame, anyway, the advantages of being proactive, airing one’s own “dirty laundry,” and “telling on oneself” are too significant to ignore. Chief among these advantages is the ability to control the first messages and how a story is first framed. That leaves others having to respond to you instead of the other way around. This approach is appropriately termed “stealing thunder” (Williams, Bourgeois, and Croyle 1993). When an organization steals thunder, it breaks the news about its own crisis before the crisis is discovered by the media or other interested parties. In experimental research by Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2005), stealing thunder in a crisis situation, as opposed to allowing the information to be first disclosed by another party, resulted in substantially higher credibility ratings (p. 425). As significant, the authors found that “credibility ratings associated with stealing thunder directly predicted perceptions of the crisis as less severe” (Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2005, 431).

## The “Inoculation” Effect

In communication theory, this term refers to a strategy of giving your audience information they can use to defend themselves against opposing arguments they may hear in the future. In essence, by giving your audience your side of the story, they are “inoculated” against any counter-arguments to which they are exposed.

One of the best examples of this strategy is seen in courtrooms every day. In their opening statements, a prosecutor and/or defense attorney will often say things like, “You will hear the [prosecution/defense] say blah, blah, blah. Well, let me tell you why that is not the case...”

Whichever side goes first, has the advantage of inoculation.

## An Update from Chief Lansdowne

By Union-Tribune Editorial Board,  
Tuesday, June 28, 2011 at midnight

The San Diego Police Department has won plenty of accolades over the years, thanks to a remarkably low city crime rate. But with nine officers facing allegations of misconduct since February, the department's reputation has taken a harsh hit. [emphasis added]

Thankfully, Police Chief William Lansdowne appears to recognize the need to quickly address SDPD's problems. In an interview with the U-T editorial board on Monday, the chief said he had met with more than 90 percent of the Police Department in 13 meetings over the past month, getting vast input on how he could help prevent officers from going bad. These and other discussions prompted Lansdowne to assign four more officers to his Internal Affairs unit. He has encouraged department leaders to identify and to aggressively reach out to officers who display signs of problems with alcohol or job stress or other issues. Among several other steps, he also has set up an anonymous hotline to allow colleagues of officers, or neighbors, family, or friends of officers to report troubling behavior they have witnessed.

Lansdowne says his 1,800-plus officers are eager to help because "they're as embarrassed and angry" as he is about the cloud over his department. That's good to hear, and we hope this attitude yields the constructive change that Lansdowne, the Police Department, and all San Diegans want and need.

[www.signonsandiego.com/news/2011/jun/28/an-update-from-chief-lansdowne/](http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2011/jun/28/an-update-from-chief-lansdowne/)

As the name implies, stealing thunder is not a strategy that necessarily endears the police to media outlets looking for breaking exclusives. However, as much as a reporter would prefer to do it for you, no one can fault a police agency for getting its own bad news out there. Coming clean is often seen in a very positive light, assuming it does not come after a string of repeated denials. To be sure, this approach alone may not be enough to carry the day, especially if other issues later surface that cast doubt on the situation or the people involved. It is the beginning of a potential strategy, but what happens after it can diminish its effectiveness, or even completely wipe out any advantage and cause more damage.

If additional misdeeds come to light, issues of trustworthiness surface, or questions are raised about conduct, the value of having stolen thunder can be buried under a mountain of other troubling developments. While stealing thunder does not insulate the police from subsequent negative press or additional inquiries, it could blunt the blows or give the advantage of the inoculation effect (see sidebar). Take that over a whistleblower story or media expose' any day.

**Obviously, being first is harder than it used to be.** Unless you discover and make public your own crisis, you will usually fail in meeting the public's expectations for disclosure and speed. Sensational news travels at a dizzying speed. Brewing internal crises can be leaked to a reporter or posted anonymously on a blog. Natural disasters, explosions, and shootings are all public long before a single word of any official public statement can be crafted. And, since news can be shared instantly by anyone with a cell phone or a keyboard, it is increasingly difficult to be the first source. This environment gives the media, bystanders, and critics the advantage of filling the information gaps, often with disparaging portrayals of the police.



**This age of instant communication has brought with it several harsh realities for crisis managers. Technology has sped up the whole process and reduced the amount of time you have to respond.** In these situations, there is great temptation to “hunker down,” “circle the wagons,” and otherwise avoid responding in hopes the issue will go away. Unfortunately, this sort of behavior tends to have the opposite effect. Rather than going away, the issue persists and becomes more complex and intense. What might have been a one- or two-day news story becomes a painfully protracted saga and by the time the agency does respond, it is too little, too late. Like a person who ignores symptoms and postpones visits to a doctor until the situation is dire and the diagnosis is grave, a police agency that ignores the early opportunities to communicate risks greater damage and longer term negative consequences.

The first step, then, is to resist the temptation to ignore the symptoms. The “120 shots incident” was not one the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department had the opportunity to address before anyone found out. Still, the department met the challenge with urgency, got the official information out and made a decisive statement regarding the department’s position. These actions were not only viewed favorably but they served to change the tone of the coverage and quell a situation that might otherwise have escalated.

**Not only must the police gather accurate information in the midst of chaotic circumstances, they also must clear up misinformation that is being spread through traditional and social media.** Monitor and respond to the flood of information (and misinformation) that is being released, tweeted, texted, posted, phoned in and otherwise broadcast to hundreds, thousands and even millions of people. Therefore, the department should be monitoring what others are saying and, to the best extent possible and appropriate, clear up any inaccuracies.

### THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF

**If there is ever a time for a police executive to exhibit true leadership, it is when things go wrong.** This is especially true when employee wrongdoing (intentional or accidental) is at the heart of the crisis or when there is line of duty death, but it is also important in critical external events such as large-scale riots and natural or man-made disasters. In times of crisis, people look to their leaders for guidance, answers, accountability, and hope. The police executive must be the lead spokesperson in the wake of a crisis.

**Others will play key roles and serve as spokespeople for various parts of a response, but the chief or sheriff must be visible in the commanding role.**

Much has been written about the qualities leaders must exhibit in times of crisis. Much has also been written about stunning examples of failure in leadership. Many “leadership disasters have common ingredients, such as executives who lack integrity and build organizational cultures where dissent isn’t heard” (Lytle 2009). Some of the most damning criticism of leaders occurs when what they say or do—or don’t say and don’t do—demonstrates their failure to grasp the gravity of the circumstances or exhibit the necessary care and concern.

## DEEPWATER HORIZON

The Deepwater Horizon incident placed people in crisis management roles; however, not all were able to demonstrate leadership in crisis as a core competency. The performance of crisis leaders during this incident was uneven at best. In some cases, perceived ineffective leadership led to loss of public confidence in the ability of Government and industry to manage the response to the spill.

Leaders not trained and prepared to function effectively in a crisis can create an image of incompetence, chaos, or disorganization, even if the incident is being managed competently and effectively. In most cases, the leader in a crisis is the “face” of the organization he or she represents; in some cases it may be virtually the only time the public is aware of the organization. The reputation of that organization will largely be determined by the performance of the crisis leader. (p. 57).

—U.S. Coast Guard Report

In the aftermath of the April 2010 deadly explosion and oil spill from BP Oil’s Deepwater Horizon, the U.S. Coast Guard led the Incident Specific Preparedness Review (ISPR) process to examine the response to the crisis. One section of the comprehensive (and candid) January 2011 report focuses on Characteristics and Qualifications of Effective Crisis Leaders. The report offers an evaluation and summary that is instructive for leaders in any significant crisis situation. The report goes on to identify and define the characteristics of good crisis leadership. The list is powerful; it is comprehensive and easily applicable to police executives who face crises of any magnitude (p. 58–59):

- **Command Presence:** The ability to project an image of being in charge and able to effectively address the crisis....This elusive but necessary quality will have a dramatic effect on the public’s confidence in the entire response.
- **Authoritativeness:** The ability to speak with authority. This is best accomplished with sufficient command of detail to assure national leadership, the media, and the public that the leader is knowledgeable in all facets of the response.
- **Integrity:** The ability to be both transparent and truthful in all actions. There are many occasions in which information released may not show the organization in a favorable light, and the temptation is to withhold or script information to avoid criticism. Once a leader’s integrity is attacked, that person’s value to the organization is severely diminished, and the leader should be removed from the response effort. The organization will find itself doing damage control, and any information released in the future will be suspect.

- **Stamina:** The Deepwater Horizon incident became a protracted disaster response lasting months. Crisis leaders representing the RP (Responsible Party) remained in place throughout the response, with little or no rotation...Rotation of crisis leaders at the highest levels is problematic for continuity of operations, and for the public's expectation of seeing one face and hearing one voice...Crisis leaders at the highest levels should be prepared to manage all the way from mobilization through demobilization phases of the response.
- **Strategic Thinking and Command of Detail:** The ability to think strategically and have command of detail. These traits complement each other, and allow the leader to speak authoritatively. The inability of a leader to project the image that he/she has command of "the big picture" erodes public confidence, and impacts subordinates in the response organization.
- **Stress Management:** The ability to function during periods of extreme stress. A crisis will most certainly bring high levels of stress during critical periods of the response. The Deepwater Horizon incident may be a benchmark for stress on the response organization from political and media pressure...Those unable to function well under stress did not provide the best of their efforts to the response.
- **Decisiveness:** A willingness to act decisively even when provided with incomplete information. A crisis leader cannot be averse to risk. That is not to imply that decisions should be made without the best available information and advice; however, a crisis leader needs to make timely decisions, and the inability to do so will adversely impact the response...Crisis leaders are selected for their ability to assess risk, minimize that risk where possible, and decide among alternatives to achieve a desired outcome. Crisis leaders continually monitor the effectiveness of their prior decisions in preparation of future direction.
- **Responsibility, Accountability, and Authority:** In the selection of a crisis leader, there is implied trust that the person possesses the requisite skills to make rational decisions. If the crisis leader is given responsibility and is held accountable, he/she must have commensurate authority for decision-making and exercise that authority.
- **Enhanced Leadership Skills:** The crisis leader must possess leadership traits that allow him or her to transcend the pressures of a crisis and use those traits through the duration of the event. Skills such as multitasking, organizational development, analytical and communications skills (which include listening), and the ability to delegate and leverage organizational flexibility is vital. At the higher levels, it is important to understand and be able to function within the political environment.
- **Ability to Inspire:** A skilled crisis leader is calm in the midst of chaos. A crisis leader has position power but is most effective leading through "personal power." Effective leaders inspire rather than intimidate subordinates and have the interpersonal skills to build a cohesive team able to work under stress toward achieving a mutual goal.

Of the many valuable lessons learned from the tragic events of the Deepwater Horizon, none would serve the police executive better than the guidance on leadership.

### MESSAGING

**It matters little that you get everything else right if your message misses the mark.** As Barton (2008) puts it, “In crisis communications, every word counts, every nuance matters” (p. 224). Staying with the example of the Deepwater Horizon crisis, BP Oil’s CEO Tony Hayward provided several stunning examples of message malfunction. Among the many, two stand out: on May 18, 2010, four weeks after the April 20, 2010 explosion, Hayward told reporters, “I think the environmental impact of this disaster is likely to have been very, very modest.” And then on May 31, 2010, he uttered the now infamous, “We’re sorry for the massive disruption it’s caused their lives. There’s no one who wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back” (Snyder 2010).

These examples highlight two major failures of BP’s messaging (or apparent lack thereof): downplaying the effects despite visible evidence to the contrary that was playing out in people’s living rooms every day, and conveying callousness.

The communication strategy and specific circumstances of the event guide you on what to say and how to say it. Barton (2008) offers succinct guidance for developing crisis messaging: “**What did you know? When did you know it? What did you do about it?**” (p. 34). Key points that will inform your message construction include:

- **Emotions Dominate in Crisis Situations.** Peter Sandman, a recognized expert in risk communication, coined the phrase, “It’s the outrage, stupid,” and the concomitant “formula” of Risk = Hazard + Outrage. Central to Sandman’s approach is the notion that public outrage about an issue or event is as important—perhaps even more important—than the actual hazard that got them upset in the first place.

The challenge is, what you think would outrage people may not, and what you do not think would create outrage makes people ready to light their hair on fire. According to Sandman,

The most important fact about risk communication is the incredibly low correlation between a risk’s “hazard” (how much harm it’s likely to do) and its “outrage” (how upset it’s likely to make people). The risks that kill people are not necessarily the risks that anger and frighten people. If you know a risk is dangerous, that tells you almost nothing about whether it’s upsetting. If you know it’s upsetting, that tells you almost nothing about whether it’s dangerous ([www.psandman.com/index-intro.htm](http://www.psandman.com/index-intro.htm)). He further explains, “The overarching problem is that the public cares too little about the hazard, and the experts care too little about the outrage. Both are preoccupied with legitimate but incomplete definitions of risk” (Sandman 1993, 8).

**Risk = Hazard + Outrage** is the equation Sandman coined in the 1980s as a way of helping people understand how the public perceives risk as opposed to how experts define it. Unless and until you acknowledge and/or address the emotional aspects of a situation, people are ill-equipped to reason. And they often cannot get beyond that outrage. Often, we do little to help them get over it. If anything, we tend to fan the outrage flames.

- **All messages should be evaluated in terms of two parts: Content and Position.** *Content* includes incident details, people involved, actions taken or planned, and recommended public actions. *Position* refers to the official response of the department relative to the events. Depending on the circumstances, the position can range from outrage to apology, expressions of empathy to accepting blame. A “just the facts” approach in crises satisfies only one part of the message equation. It focuses on the hazard and ignores the outrage. This has the tendency to actually further inflame people who are already upset.
- **Be clear about what information will be released (or withheld) and why.** There are plenty of reasons information may not be released, starting with the obvious: you do not yet have all of the information. You can only release what you know to be true at the time. And more often than not, initial reports are wrong, sometimes wildly so.

*Case in point #1:* Early reports in the aftermath of the Fort Hood shooting claimed the shooter was dead and two other soldiers were being held. The next day, the information was corrected. The major was not dead after all and the soldiers were no longer in custody.

*Case in point #2:* In the case of the D.C. sniper, early reports focused on a white van. As it turned out, there was no white van involved.

It is a natural part of a chaotic scene that initial information is incorrect or incomplete and investigations follow leads that go nowhere. This is why verifying information and revising as new information becomes known are so important.

- **Disseminate Information to Employees and other primary Stakeholders** (i.e., elected or appointed officials and community leaders). Others will expect these people to know what is going on. Employees who serve as points of contact for the public, like communications, 311 center representatives, and patrol officers, should be among the first individuals to receive any public statements.
- **Keep it simple—especially at first.** As Coombs (2007) points out, crisis communication occurs in times of stress and people are not at their best under these conditions. “Research suggests that people’s ability to process information is reduced by up to 80 percent during emotionally charged situations, such as crises” (Gilman 2004, as cited in Coombs 2007, 128). Making sure messages are clear, unambiguous, and focused on just a few points is key to managing communication when emotions are heightened.

- **Give People Direction.** Part of the message, whenever feasible, should highlight the actions people can take. In a crisis, people want—even need—to do something, *anything*. *Do not miss the opportunity to include appropriate calls to action in your messaging.* You can tell them things they can either do to keep themselves and their families' safe, or to help others.

In the wake of 9/11, people poured in to Manhattan to help serve food, donate blood, and anything else they could think of or were asked to do. During natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis that devastate whole geographies, people want to help rebuild or donate clothes or money. On a much smaller scale, police departments experience these outpourings in the wake of line of duty deaths of officers. Effectively managing and channeling this outpouring is important.

Because the desire to help is strongest in the immediate aftermath of an event, it is helpful to include some guidance about these activities in your crisis plan. While it is unlikely a department can accommodate every volunteer or support what they want to do, procedures should be implemented quickly to capitalize on the interest and minimize frustrations. It is wise to give the matter some thought before you find yourself inundated with calls from people who want to volunteer and have nothing to do.

Often a department can enlist assistance from outside agencies to head up volunteer efforts. As you think through what kind of assistance you could use in a particular situation, consider how community not-for-profits, houses of worship, schools, and other organizations can be plugged in.

### PREPARING SPOKESPEOPLE

Once messages are crafted, spokespersons must be prepared. Just as it is a mistake to publish written statements without reviewing the material to ensure accuracy, it is a mistake to send someone in front of a microphone without proper preparation. Even the most seasoned and practiced spokespersons understand that the first time important statements are articulated out loud should not be when cameras are rolling. Rehearse the major messages and anticipate what questions will be asked. This can be an organized spokesperson training session or it can occur while standing in a parking lot at 2:00 in the morning minutes before facing reporters.

The key point is to say out loud what the message should be, resolve wording that does not sound quite right and practice how to respond to what Barton (2008, 237) terms “the worst 20,” which he describes as “the 20 most disturbing questions” you can imagine being asked. Talk through responses.

Reporters have a job to do, and that includes asking questions for which there is no immediate answer or they already know the information cannot be disclosed. Some will pose questions designed to provoke, others will lob hypothetical questions intended to elicit speculations. Stick with what is known, reinforce key messages, and assure regular updates.

## TARGET PUBLICS

**Advance thinking about who the priority stakeholders are and how you plan to reach them saves time and could contribute to maintaining safety, minimizing further damage, and reducing costs.** As with the more general strategic communications plan, how to prioritize target publics is a key consideration. It used to be enough just to hold a news conference when important information had to be communicated. A police official would talk to gathered reporters and they would go off and tell the masses the important information. Not anymore.

As we have seen, new technologies and social media have completely changed how people gather and access information. The days of relying almost exclusively on traditional media to carry an agency's message should be behind you. Capitalizing on the ability to communicate directly with target publics, and the power this approach holds, should be at the forefront of an agency's strategy. Depending on the specific circumstances of the incident and the channels of communication developed, it is reasonable to argue that a news release or conference may be among the last tactics to execute.

**The question of “prioritizing publics” boils down to deciding which audiences matter more**—the community members with whom the police have worked so hard to develop relationships, or the uninvolved bystanders who will see a news story. When given the choice, come down on the side of community members and employees every time.

These are the groups and relationships in which a police agency has already invested considerable time and energy. Beyond engaging community stakeholders in crime prevention, these relationships should serve as sources of support when times are bad. But they can only be counted on to offer support when they are treated as trusted allies, not life preservers. Few may rush to defend the police but many might resist the temptation to “pile on” if given advance and direct information and subsequent opportunities to meet with police officials.

Who do you tell first, second, third, etc.? The unique circumstances of the situation will guide decision-making, but in general, prioritizing elected and appointed officials, community, business, and neighborhood leaders, employees, and other equally important constituents will serve an agency well in its continuing efforts to build community trust.

## Deputizing Stakeholders:

Letting constituents hear directly from a police executive has several distinct advantages over any strategy that first plays out on a media stage:

*First*, it allows the executive to deliver his whole message intact.

*Second*, it communicates to constituents that they are important.

*Third*, it enables an agency to “steal thunder” from critics and “inoculate” an audience against counter information.

*Fourth*, it reinforces an agency's efforts to build community trust and confidence in its police.

*Finally*, it “deputizes” stakeholders to share the information through their own social networks in a way that allows them to claim insider status: “I received this information from the Chief/Sheriff,” is far more powerful than: “I saw this on the news.”

Few crisis situations afford the luxury of much time to delineate between communicating with target publics and releasing information to the masses. Sometimes, it may only be minutes that separate an e-mail blast to stakeholders and posting a statement on a department website or blog, from walking into a room full of reporters. That is enough. Say, “The following information is being released to the media. I wanted you to have it first.” These two short sentences convey to recipients how important they are.

Good crisis communication not only focuses on whom to target, but pays attention to what others—media, politicians, community leaders, etc.—are saying. How a department reacts to a situation early on, what it does and does not say, and how it adjusts over time can have significant impacts on how others respond to and characterize the event. It can influence the future trajectory.

### HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM: MANAGE ISSUES TO PREVENT CRISES

One of the most challenging aspects of crises is recognizing the warning signs early enough to avert escalation of a situation. “**The best crisis is the one that has been prevented,**” says crisis management expert Lawrence Barton (2008, 18).

Police officers are trained to detect and defuse threats. It is a part of the job. And yet, as Paul Patterson, Senior Director of Community and Public Affairs for the Vancouver Police Department, points out:

*“Studies show that the vast majority of crises faced by law enforcement agencies are caused by senior management, either by something they said or did or failed to do. The next biggest likelihood is that the crisis was caused by one of your own members. There is a much smaller chance that you are facing a natural crisis such as an earthquake. But even then it is important to remember that the natural crisis may pale in comparison to the subsequent crisis that will be caused by something senior management did or failed to do in dealing with the disaster.”* (personal communication, 2011)

To be fair, it is easy to be critical of earlier actions or inactions in light of the events that unfolded when people have the benefit of 20-20 hindsight and a view of the whole picture. Those who have gone through controversial incidents know what a bloodthirsty sport it can be as reporters and pundits piece together events and pinpoint early warning signs that were missed or that resulted in insufficient action to prevent or mitigate resulting tragedies. How the warnings were missed or dismissed gets a laser focus, with critics often concluding that more competent people would have picked up on the warning signs and acted swiftly to avert a crisis.



Take the case of Nidal Malik Hasan, the Army Major who massacred people at Fort Hood on November 5, 2009. Were there warning signs? Apparently so. Although there are no reports indicating there were warnings he had intended to shoot anyone, there were signs that he was upset and perhaps unbalanced. Suppose the concerns about him led people to conclude they should do something. What could/should have been done to prevent/mitigate the likelihood of any critical incidents? This is an area of great legal and ethical debate and especially sound legal counsel should be sought in responding to such hindsight questions.

Unlike the movie “*Minority Report*,” in which premonitions of crimes were used to stop criminals before the act was committed, our laws are predicated on behavior (verbal or nonverbal), not thoughts. There is no law against THINKING about committing a crime. TALK about committing a certain violent act however, could be a case of communicating threats, which is a crime. But generally speaking, most of our laws require some behavioral action. A person cannot be arrested because they *think* about drinking and driving, or even *talk* about drinking and driving. A person must engage in the behavior or someone must observe actions (weaving, going slower than the posted speed limit, missing traffic control devices, or having an accident) that give a law enforcement officer reasonable suspicion to make a traffic stop.

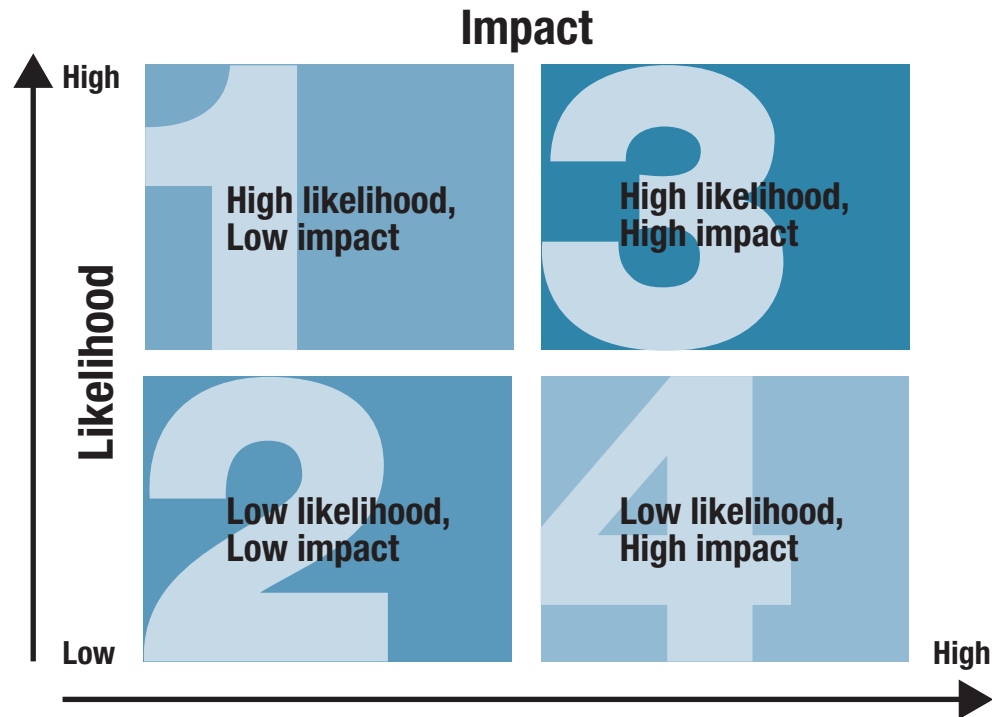
So, what behavior (verbal or nonverbal) did Major Hasan exhibit that (a) was against the law and/or (b) would have risen him to a level of surveillance/monitoring? Armed with suspicions but no proclamations that he intended to massacre people at the base, what could authorities have done? Void of any indications he was planning to shoot people, how could authorities have implemented a plan to contain him that would not be seen as racist, profiling, or in violation of his civil rights?

We could ask these same questions in light of other similar horrific shootings—Columbine, Virginia Tech, and the Binghamton, New York immigration counseling center. Clearly, these are very difficult issues. In the light of the events as they unfolded, it is quite natural to ask how they could have been prevented.

**Not all situations are destined for crisis status. In fact, like good policing that prevents the next crime, good crisis planning and response can prevent a situation from escalating to the level of a crisis.** Failing to recognize changing circumstances or react quickly enough to those changing circumstances can compound an already difficult situation. Under-react and one is criticized for failing to grasp the magnitude of the situation. Over-react and one is criticized for “crying wolf” and causing unnecessary alarm. So how do you get the response “just right”?

As with an overall strategic communication plan, **one of the first steps in developing a crisis communication plan is to conduct a situational analysis.** This involves identifying potential issues and knowing what you could be up against.

Figure 14.



Source: Data original to this report and compiled by co-author Julie Hill, Ph.D

### SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The matrix in Figure 14 provides a way to conceptualize the types of issues that could impact a police organization:

- **Both boxes #1 and #2 are good, at least from a crisis management perspective.** These are the nuisances and problems. Headaches, to be sure, but if contained, they are the kinds of routine issues that happen to even the best people and companies. These events may get some attention but not very much and they disappear from public consciousness pretty quickly.
- **Box #4 is cautionary—high impact events that are less likely to occur.** These are the rare events that may never happen, or happen so infrequently, they are not on the radar screen. However, should they occur, they could spell crisis, tragedy, and disaster. Spend time worrying about what goes on in this box.
- **Box #3 is similar to #4—high impact, but these events are more likely to happen** and therefore, theoretically, you should be better prepared to respond to them because these are the events that keep people up at night.

Managing issues to prevent crises is akin to taking credit for what doesn't happen. Early identification of problems can avert a crisis.

In an interview for the book, *Daring to Fail: First Person Stories of Criminal Justice Reform* (Center for Court Innovation 2010), former police chief Bill Bratton provided his frank perspective:

*“Recognizing failure is very important. We tend to only look at failure in times of crisis, such as when a parolee commits a heinous crime. But paying attention in times of calm is when it’s most valuable because it allows for more careful review. Doing so does involve risks, though. You can’t hold on to failure just because fixing it is risk-intensive. You have to be willing to uncover what went wrong. I can think of a recent example. In Los Angeles, the police department struggled in its response to a May Day immigration rally. There was failure everywhere—in planning and in leadership. When it was over, we took a close look at what happened. I’m a better police chief now because of it, and the LAPD is a much better department because of the transparency that was displayed while addressing the failure.”* (p. 9)

—Former Police Chief Bill Bratton  
Boston, New York, and Los Angeles Police

### DRAFTING A WORKABLE CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

**There is built-in tension in the management process when a crisis hits. Most people are going to be focused on fixing the problem, managing the risk or dealing with the aftermath, not on communication.** The communications professionals will be focused on communication, not on the specifics of solving the problem. It is exactly this dilemma, this tension that you can prepare for through advance planning. General agreement upfront about how the organization will approach the release of information can help minimize conflicts that inevitably occur between the people who feel the urgency to get information out and the people who would prefer, for any number of reasons, to wait.

**The purpose of a Crisis Communication Plan is not to spell out every single possibility. That is neither realistic nor necessary. Rather, it should anticipate what is probable/likely and outline response protocols consistent with the organization’s operational incident management plans.** The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and National Response Framework (NRF) provide all-hazards guidance for incident management and include sections for public information plans and functions. *For copies of the NIMS and NRF documents, as well as access to training and other materials, visit [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).*

**At a minimum, the structure of a good crisis communication plan should: Document roles and responsibilities; how information is gathered from within the organization; how external inquiries will be handled; who is going to approve messages; and who will be designated as spokesperson(s).**

Once the structure is in place, you will add templates, fact sheets, backgrounders, and other information that you will need (and not have time to draft on the fly).

**The specific content of a plan will depend on the unique characteristics of the organization.** The more complex the organization, the more likely it is the plan will require more sections. Regardless of the exact format of an agency's plan, it should:

1. **Have support from the top** of the organization.
2. **Outlive any one individual.** The plan should be written so others can understand and implement it long after any one person has gone.
3. **Be brief, yet thorough.** These words may seem contradictory, but they are not. Who has time to read a lot when they are in the midst of a crisis? So while you want to make sure you include essential information (be thorough), how the plan is written will be key (be brief). For example, instead of presenting information in paragraph style, use bullet lists, charts, and other easy-to-read ways of conveying the content.
4. **Anticipate events.** Every crisis is different and the response should be scalable to deal with smaller, more contained/isolated situations to large-scale man-made or natural disasters. Be bold in envisioning the crises that could befall your organization. A lot of people do not want to think about the worst case scenarios, but that is exactly what is required to develop a crisis plan of any value.
5. **Evaluate and augment the organization's capacity for handling various crises.** Talk to people in key positions and people with organizational history who can help determine best practices. Identify outside resources (public affairs staff from other departments, for example) who could be called upon to assist. Emergencies frequently happen at the most inconvenient times—at night, on the weekends, or when key people are on vacation. With this in mind, you can establish tiers of backups, and make sure that both the “first team” and the backups know their roles.
6. **Provide guidance on priorities and messages.** Clear thinking can sometimes be a challenge in the swirl of a crisis. Templates and pre-scripted messages help you remember things you may not recall under the stress of a crisis situation.
7. **Establish reporting processes.** Clearly articulate how information is to be shared and when the communications professionals are to be notified.
8. **Outline alternative protocols.** For example, 911 Call Centers routinely practice manual call taking and dispatch processes in the event the 911 CAD (computer-aided dispatch) system or other parts of this critical service fail. Spell out what your organization would do if critical communication systems were inoperable for any length of time. Similarly, what would your organization do if:
  - There is no electricity
  - The building in which you work is uninhabitable or destroyed
  - The computer system on which you rely is out of commission or unavailable
  - Cellular phone service is disrupted

These considerations go beyond how the organization itself will function. When citizens have no electricity, what means will be employed to communicate critical information?

- 9. Be up-to-date.** An out-dated plan is almost like having no plan at all. It results in a huge waste of time and energy when you can least afford it. Keep it current.
- 10. Be taken out for a test drive.** You can write a great plan, but if no one dusts it off every once in a while and tests it, then it's not the valuable tool it should be—it's just a paperweight. Conduct tabletop exercises, drills, or simulations to train employees and others on the plan. These exercises can also expose weaknesses you can fix while you still have time.



*A central objective of the toolkit is to persuade CEOs and public affairs directors to develop communications plans.*

---

---

## CHAPTER VII – Conclusion: Going Forward

The Institute for Public Relations held its second annual National Summit on Strategic Communications in June 2011, aimed at both the public and private sectors. The focus of the Summit was on the following ([www.strategicsummit.com/](http://www.strategicsummit.com/)):

- Creating organizational cultures that value communications
- Identifying the balance point between increasing accessibility and knowledge-sharing and the new reality of radical transparency
- Using strategies that encourage free flow of data and information at precisely the time when more transparency and conversation with stakeholders is needed
- Enabling enterprise-wide access to information as a catalyst to synchronizing and integrating all departments or business functions
- Using on-demand, fact-based information to lead thought in social media
- Identifying effective and persuasive metrics to prove the value of communications and information-sharing
- Using next-generation technologies to reach target audiences
- Communicating to build partnerships with multiple stakeholders across diverse cultures

A series of workshops and discussions were offered to address the issues highlighted above. It is clear the focus of the Summit has great relevancy to law enforcement organizations and touches on many of the areas addressed in this toolkit. And, the Summit reinforces the importance of police agencies devoting time and energy to developing a communications plan that meets agency and community needs.

A central objective of this toolkit is to persuade CEOs and public affairs directors to develop communications plans. There are an enormous number of complex issues that police have to explain to both external and internal audiences. Almost every issue affects people in the community and in the organization in different ways. Talking about these issues is a task that has challenged the most effective communicators we know. And yet, we have also seen examples of innovative and thoughtful strategic approaches, many of which are incorporated into this toolkit to provide others with ideas and inspiration.

People have many choices for news and different avenues to learn about events as they are occurring. More importantly, people have the ability to BE the creators and disseminators of news and information through ever-expanding social networks. Police departments have these same opportunities.

While the traditional news media remain an important source of information, it is clear that relying on them as the primary method for informing the public represents untold missed opportunities for police departments to advance their own communication agendas. This is a tough transition for most police executives to make. They struggle with navigating social media, blogs, and instant communications to large numbers of people. They struggle with making the mindset shift required to move beyond “the way we have always done things.” And, they struggle against others inside and outside the department who may not fully support the department’s own “news bureau” approach. Social media does not work when layers of approvals and sign-off’s have to be obtained before a tweet can be sent or a post can go live on a Facebook page. The policies and procedures developed for these activities must at once recognize the immediacy of the information and the conditions in which they can occur.

As the organization’s leader, the CEO is critical to the success of any new initiative and to a sustained commitment to important departmental programs. Communications strategy is an area in which the CEO is particularly vital to the successful development and implementation of an approach to guide the agency’s efforts. The development of a plan requires the CEO’s direct involvement because it touches every part of the department and requires the involvement of those responsible for each area. A step-by-step process for developing a communications plan is offered in Chapter III. The process is not complicated, but does require attention to detail and a careful examination of the current situation internally and externally. A communications plan must be written with the achievement of the department’s overall goals and objectives in mind. This plan is the department’s guide to connecting with its various audiences to help them understand policing issues or to influence their behavior in ways that help achieve goals.

Once developed, the implementation of a plan would be severely hampered without the CEO’s continued support and involvement. CEO’s set the tone for successful communication in the way they deal with the news media and use the various tools that are now so much a part of daily life. If the CEO is open in interactions with the news media and the community, the rest of the organization will follow. If the CEO encourages and supports the use of the opportunities presented by the social media, the organization will look for ways to take advantage of these tools. Commissioner Charles Ramsey’s inclusion of the Communications Director in daily conference calls with commanders throughout Philadelphia is a powerful message of the importance of thinking about communications as issues are reviewed and discussed.



A key factor in the changing role and presence of the news media has been the growth of the Internet and cable television. There are more choices for news, and options for obtaining information, than at any time in our history and there are no signs of things slowing down in the near future. We've talked about some of the communication tools that are available and how some agencies are using them to connect with people in their community and agency. The Boston Police Department has developed a separate website that is devoted to be the "source of news" about crime and policing issues in the city. Agency websites have become an important source of information for people in the community as well as those elsewhere who are interested in the community. It is a 24/7 presence for the department that can present a very positive image—or, if not properly developed, can leave visitors with a sense that things are not quite up to date.

A great many law enforcement agencies have a presence on sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. They are experimenting with these tools to figure out the best way to reach the growing number of people in their communities who use them. It is one thing to have a presence on these sites; it is another to have sorted out how these tools fit within the overall communications plan of the department.

Having plans and getting comfortable with thinking strategically about communication messages and tools will be especially valuable when the inevitable crisis develops. All law enforcement agencies experience crises at one time or another and while the size and duration may vary, these situations require extraordinary response efforts as well as extreme demands on communications capacity. Law enforcement agencies are judged by political leaders and the community on how well they respond to crisis situations. Those judgments will be largely influenced by the way and the frequency with which people are informed of the crisis and the steps taken to resolve the situation.

Just as operational and tactical plans are designed to be living, changing documents, communication plans must be updated as circumstances warrant. New venues are coming online every day. Some may quickly die, others may grow to rival the current social networking powerhouses like Facebook and YouTube. Staying current is part of staying relevant, building trust, and developing productive relationships that are so critical to the business of public safety. In a world in which one badly worded statement can garner national exposure, amateur video can be uploaded and go viral in a matter of hours, and a "reply all" mistake can send inappropriate responses, the rewards for having a plan are too great to ignore.



---

---

## REFERENCES

- Ahes, C. B. 2003. "Campaign excellence: A survey of silver anvil award winners compares current PR practice with planning, campaign theory." *Public Relations Strategist* (Summer).
- Arpan, L. M., and D. R. Roskos-Ewoldsen. 2005. "Stealing thunder: Analysis of the effects of proactive disclosure of crisis information." *Public Relations Review* 31 (3): 425–433. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.05.003
- Associated Press. 2010. "Calif. police union fights budget cuts with billboards advertising blood splatter, murder rate." *Fox News*, June 2. [www.foxnews.com/us/2010/06/02/calif-police-union-fights-budget-cuts-billboards-advertising-blood-splatter/#ixzz1SCX0UJXn](http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/06/02/calif-police-union-fights-budget-cuts-billboards-advertising-blood-splatter/#ixzz1SCX0UJXn)
- Barber, B. and P. Lassek. 2009. "Smaller forces expected." *Tulsa World*, December 20. [www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=16&articleid=20091220\\_11\\_A1\\_TlaPlc922719](http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=16&articleid=20091220_11_A1_TlaPlc922719)
- Barton, L. 2008. *Crisis leadership now: A real-world guide to preparing for threats, disaster, sabotage and scandal*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Bratton, W. 2008. LAPD Chief of Police, Presentation at a Major Cities Chiefs Association Round Table Discussion.
- Braunstein, S. and W. Cheek. (eds). 2006. *Best practices in law enforcement public information*. Alexandria, VA: IACP.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics (2010) Criminal Victimization in the United States. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cvus/current/cv0791.pdf>
- Casady, T. September 3, 2010. Not just patrol. <http://lpd304.blogspot.com/>
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department. 2009. Year to Date Summary. <http://charmeck.org/city/charlotte/CMPD/safety/CrimeStat/Documents/CS09DecYearEndRpt.pdf>
- Coombs, W. T. 2007. *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*, Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Corwin, J. 2009. *Budget consequences*. April 28. <http://kcpdchief.blogspot.com/search/label/budget>.
- Corwin, J. 2009. *Impact of budget cuts on number of officers*. May 14. <http://kcpdchief.blogspot.com/search/label/budget>
- County of Los Angeles Office of Independent Review OIR Public Report on the May 9, 2005 Compton Shooting. Summer 2005. [http://laoir.com/reports/Compton\\_rpt.pdf](http://laoir.com/reports/Compton_rpt.pdf)

- CrimeReports (2010) [www.crimereports.com/company/about](http://www.crimereports.com/company/about) CTIA 2011. International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry [www.ctia.org/advocacy/research/index.cfm/aid/10323](http://www.ctia.org/advocacy/research/index.cfm/aid/10323)
- Decline in newsroom jobs slows*. 2010. April 11. [http://asne.org/annual\\_conference/conference\\_news/articleid/763/decline-in-newsroom-jobs-slows.aspx](http://asne.org/annual_conference/conference_news/articleid/763/decline-in-newsroom-jobs-slows.aspx)
- Dezenhall, E. and J. Weber. 2007. *Damage control: Why everything you know about crisis management is wrong*. New York: Portfolio.
- Diaz, J. 2011. Seattle Police Chief. Personal conversation. June.
- Edelman Trust Barometer. 2010. Edelman. <http://www.edelman.com/trust/2010/>.
- Editorial. 2010. "Springfield's police face crisis in confidence." *The Republican Editorials* January 12, [www.masslive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2010/01/citys\\_police\\_face\\_crisis\\_in\\_co.html](http://www.masslive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2010/01/citys_police_face_crisis_in_co.html)
- Eschholz, S., M. Mallard, and S. Flynn. 2003." Images of prime time justice: A content analysis of 'NYPD Blue' and 'Law & Order.'" *Policing: An International Journal of Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 10, no. 3: 161–180.
- Fearn-Banks, K. 2007. *Crisis communications: A casebook approach*. Third edition. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2009. 2008 Crime in the United States. [www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2008/index.html](http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2008/index.html)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2011. 2010 Crimes Rates Fall Again. May 23, [www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2011/may/crimes\\_052311/crime\\_052311](http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2011/may/crimes_052311/crime_052311)
- Federal Government's favorable ratings slump: State and local still viewed positively. (2008, May 14). Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. <http://people-press.org/2008/05/14/federal-governments-favorable-ratings-slump/2/>
- Fog, K., C. Budtz, and B. Yakaboylu. 2005. *Storytelling: branding in practice*. Frederiksberg, Denmark: Springer.
- Fox, A., and E. Gold, eds. 2010. *Daring to fail: First person stories of criminal justice reform*. New York: Center for Court Innovation.
- Garfield, B. 2009. *The chaos scenario*. Hagerstown, MD: Stielstra Publishing.
- Goldhaber, G. M., and Rogers, D. P. 1979. *Auditing organizational communication systems: The ICA communication audit*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishing Co.
- Greenbaum, H. H., P. Clampitt, and S. Willihnganz. 1988. "Organizational communication: An examination of four instruments." *Management Communication Quarterly* 2 (2): 245.
- Grunig, J. E. (1997). A situational theory of publics: Conceptual history, recent challenges and new research. In D. Moss, T. MacManus, & D. Vercic (Eds.), *Public relations research: An International Perspective* (pp. 3-46). London: International Thomson Business Press.

- Guth, D. W., and C. Marsh. 2012. *Public relations: A values-driven approach*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Hickman, M., and A. Reaves. 2006. *Local police departments, 2003*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. p. 22.
- History of Cable Television. (n.d.). National Cable and Telecommunication Association. [www.ncta.com/About/About/HistoryofCableTelevision.aspx?source=Resources](http://www.ncta.com/About/About/HistoryofCableTelevision.aspx?source=Resources) IACP. 2006. Best practices in Law Enforcement Public Information. Arlington, VA: IACP.
- IACP. 2010 Survey on Social Media. [www.iacpsocialmedia.org/](http://www.iacpsocialmedia.org/).
- Internet World Stats. 2011. United States of America. [www.internetworldstats.com/am/us.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/am/us.htm)
- Jones, J. 2009 Americans perceive increased crime in U.S. Gallup's annual crime survey. Princeton, NJ. [www.gallup.com/poll/123644/americans-perceive-increased-crime.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/123644/americans-perceive-increased-crime.aspx)
- Kelling, G. 1993. "Police accountability—A better way." *City Journal*. Winter.
- Kinsbury, A. (2007, December 7). The ex-con next door: How communities are preparing for the largest exodus of prisoners in American history. *U.S. News and World Report*.
- Lipset, S. M., and W. Schneider. 1983. *The confidence gap: Business, labor, and government in the public mind*. New York: The Free Press.
- Lovell, J. S. 2001. *Media power & information control: A study of police organizations and media relations*. The National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.
- Lytle, T. 2009. "Financial crisis, Enron, Hurricane Katrina: Examples of leadership gone wrong." *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved from [www.ihavenet.com/Financial-Crisis-Enron-Hurricane-Katrina-Examples-of-Leadership-Gone-Wrong-Tamara-Lytle.html](http://www.ihavenet.com/Financial-Crisis-Enron-Hurricane-Katrina-Examples-of-Leadership-Gone-Wrong-Tamara-Lytle.html)
- Madden, M. "Older Adults and Social Media." Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project. [www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx).
- Margolis, G., and March, N. 2004. Branding Your Agency: Creating the Police Department's Image. *Police Chief Magazine*. [www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display\\_arch&article\\_id=265&issue\\_id=42004](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=265&issue_id=42004)
- McMillan, D. 2011, August 5. *Google+ may pass Twitter among U.S. adults online*. Bloomberg. Retrieved from [www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-08-05/google-may-pass-twitter-with-one-fifth-of-u-s-adults-online.html](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-08-05/google-may-pass-twitter-with-one-fifth-of-u-s-adults-online.html).
- Morales, L. 2011. *Americans regain some confidence in newspapers, TV news: Confidence still lags behind levels of trust seen through much of the 1990s and into 2003*. June 27. [www.Gallup.com](http://www.Gallup.com).
- Morley, E. M., and M. J. Jacobson. 2011. Building a successful public information program. *Police Chief Magazine*. [www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article\\_id=1345&issue\\_id=122007](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=1345&issue_id=122007).

- Motschall, M., and L. Cao. 2002. "An analysis of the public relations role of the police public information officer." *Police Quarterly*, 5, no. 2: 152–180. doi: 10.1177/109861102129198084
- Murr, A. 1999. L.A.'S dirty war on gangs: A trail of corruption leads to some of the city's toughest cops. *Newsweek*. October 11.
- National Newspaper Association. 2009. "Facts and Figures." [www.nnaweb.org/?/nnaweb/content01/87/](http://www.nnaweb.org/?/nnaweb/content01/87/). (accessed September 11, 2010).
- Overholser, G., and Jamieson, K. H. eds. 2005. *The press*. U.S.: Oxford University Press.
- Papper, D. 2010. Staffing and profitability: 2010 TV and Radio News Staffing and Profitability Survey. [www.rtdna.org/pages/media\\_items/2010-tv-and-radio-news-staffing-and-profitability-survey1943.php?id=1943](http://www.rtdna.org/pages/media_items/2010-tv-and-radio-news-staffing-and-profitability-survey1943.php?id=1943)
- Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. The State of the News Media 2009: An Annual Report on American Journalism. [www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2009](http://www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2009) (accessed June 12, 2009).
- Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. The state of the news media 2010: An Annual Report on American Journalism. <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2010> (accessed July 3, 2010).
- Pew Research Center for Progress in Journalism. The state of the news media 2011: An Annual Report on American Journalism. <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/> (accessed August 16, 2011).
- Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. March, 2006. America's immigration quandary. <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=1048>.
- Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. 2008a. Key news audiences now blend online and traditional sources. August. <http://people-press.org/report/444/news-media> (accessed September 12, 2010).
- Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. 2008b. Federal Government's favorable ratings slump: Summary of findings. May. <http://people-press.org/report/420/federal-governments-favorable-ratings-slump> (accessed August 4, 2009).
- Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. January, 2010. Public's Priorities for 2010: Economy, Jobs, Terrorism Energy Concerns Fall, Deficit Concerns Rise. <http://people-press.org/report/584/policy-priorities-2010>.
- Purcell, K., L. Rainie, A. Mitchell, T. Rosenstiel, and K. Olmstead. March 2010. "Understanding the participatory news consumer: How internet and cell phone users have turned news into a social experience." Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. [www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News.aspx) (accessed September 10, 2010).
- Rayburn, K. 2010. "As Oakland police brace for cuts, data show they are overworked." *Oakland Tribune*. June 17.
- Reisig, M. and R. Parks. 2002. *Satisfaction with police—What matters?* U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. National Institute of Justice.

- Rivera, R. 2010. Assault Statistics of Hospitals and City Police Seem to Differ. *New York Times*. August 27.
- Saad, L. 2010. *Congress ranks last in confidence in institutions: Fifty percent “very little”/“no” confidence in Congress reading is record high*. July 22. [www.Gallup.com](http://www.Gallup.com).
- Sandman, P. 1993. *Responding to community outrage: Strategies for effective risk communication*. Fairfax, VA: American Industrial Hygiene Association.
- Sandman, P. 1994. “Risk communication.” In *Encyclopedia of the Environment*, eds. Ruth A. Eblen and William R. Eblen, 620–623. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sandman, P. 1987. “Risk communication: Facing public outrage.” *EPA Journal* (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), November, pp. 21–22.
- Seeger, M. W., T. L. Sellnow, and R. R. Ulmer. 2001. “Public relations and crisis communication: organizing and chaos.” In *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. R. Heath, 155–165. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Seeger, M. W. 2006. “Best Practices in Crisis Communication: An Expert Panel Process.” *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 34(3): 232–244. DOI: 10.1080/00909880600769944.
- Sherman, L. W. 2002. “Trust and confidence in criminal justice.” *National Institute of Justice Journal* 248: 22–31. [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000248e.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000248e.pdf) (accessed April 12, 2010).
- Simmons, A. 2007. *Whoever tells the best story wins: How to use your own stories to communicate with power and impact*. New York: AMACOM.
- Skogan, W. 2005. “Citizen satisfaction with police encounters.” *Police Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (2005): 298–321.
- Smith, R. 2009. *Strategic communication for public relations*. New York: Routledge.
- Snyder, C. 2010. Tony Hayward’s Greatest Hits. *CNN.Com*. [http://money.cnn.com/2010/06/10/news/companies/tony\\_hayward\\_quotes.fortune/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2010/06/10/news/companies/tony_hayward_quotes.fortune/index.htm).
- Stelter, B. 2011. “How the bin Laden announcement leaked out.” *New York Times*. May 1. <http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/how-the-osama-announcement-leaked-out/>.
- Stephens, D. 2011. Survey of Major Cities Chiefs Association Members. March.
- Sternberg, S. 2010. Median Age Report: Broadcast TV is aging. *The Sternberg Report*. <http://thestarryeye.typepad.com/sternberg/2010/07/in-august-1991-when-i-was-at-the-ad-agency-bozell-i-released-a-report-titled-median-age-a-measure-of-program-selectivity.html>
- Surette, R. 2001. “Public information officers: The civilianization of a criminal justice profession.” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 29, no. 2, (March-April): 107–117. doi:10.1016/0047-2352(95)00023-J.

- Teixeira, R. 2010. "Public Opinion Snapshot: Public Continues to Back Comprehensive Immigration Reform." Center for American Progress.  
[www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/01/snapshot011810.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/01/snapshot011810.html)
- Thompson, S. 2010. "Dallas council eager to see if auditor thinks police are producing reliable crime statistics." *The Dallas Morning News*. February 8.
- Top Sites: The top 500 sites on the web. [www.alexa.com/topsites](http://www.alexa.com/topsites).
- Toufexis, A. 1989. Our violent kids: A rise in brutal crimes by the young shakes the soul of society. *Time*. June 12.
- Ulmer, R. R., M. W. Seeger, and T. L. Sellnow. 2007. "Post-crisis communication and renewal: Expanding the parameters of post-crisis discourse." *Public Relations Review* 33(2): 130–134. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.015
- U.S. Coast Guard. (2011, January). BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill: Incident Specific Preparedness Review (ISPR) Final Report.
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2008, December). National Incident Management System. [www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS\\_core.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf)
- Vargas, J. 2008. *The use of contrition and apology in law enforcement crisis communications: A case study*. Retrieved March 30, 2011 from [www.scribd.com/doc/37156896/Use-of-Apology-and-Contrition-in-Law-Enforcement-Crisis-Communication](http://www.scribd.com/doc/37156896/Use-of-Apology-and-Contrition-in-Law-Enforcement-Crisis-Communication).
- Von Drehle, D. 2010. "What's behind America's falling crime rate?" *Time Magazine*, 22 February.
- Walker, S. 2005. What real police accountability looks like: The "120 shots" incident and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department response. U.S. Department of Justice, The Bureau of Justice. July. [www.unomaha.edu/criminaljustice/PDF/120shots.pdf](http://www.unomaha.edu/criminaljustice/PDF/120shots.pdf)
- Weisel, D. 2005. *Analyzing Repeat Victimization*. Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Problem-Solving Tool Series Guide No. 4. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.
- Wexler, C., M. A. Wycoff, and C. Fischer. 2007. "Good to great" policing: Application of business management principles in the public sector. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Washington, D.C.: Police Executive Research Forum.
- Wilcox, D. L., and G. T. Cameron. 2012. *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics*. Glenview, Ill: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Williams, K. D., M. J. Bourgeois, and R. T. Croyle. 1993. "The effects of stealing thunder in criminal and civil trials." *Law and Human Behavior* 17: 597–609.
- YouTube Facts and Figures. (history & statistics). [www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/17/youtube-facts-and-figures-history-statistics/](http://www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/17/youtube-facts-and-figures-history-statistics/)



---

---

## APPENDIXES

### Appendix A: Executive Briefing Participants – Milwaukee and Ft. Worth

**Don Aaron**

Metro Nashville Police  
Public Affairs Director

**Chief Art Acevedo**

Austin Police Department

**Carla Alston**

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department  
Director, Office of Public Information

**Detective Mike Baranyay**

El Paso Police Department  
Public Information Officer

**Detective Cathy Batton**

Baltimore County Police Department  
Office of the Chief/Media Relations

**Randy Blankenbaker**

Dallas Police Department  
Deputy Chief, Chief of Staff

**Sergeant Robert Biven**

Louisville Metro Police Department  
Media and Public Relations Office

**Remi Braden**

New Orleans Police Department  
Director of Public Affairs

**Lieutenant Andra Brown**

San Diego Police Department  
Operational Support Division

**Carlos Campos**

Atlanta Police Department  
Public Affairs Manager

**John Cannon**

Houston Police Department  
Senior Public Information Officer

**Deputy Chief Lee Dobrowolski**

Salt Lake City Police Department

**Elaine Driscoll**

Boston Police Department  
Director of Communications

**Sergeant Os Flores**

Arlington Police Department  
Police Office of Communication

**Chief Ed Flynn**

Milwaukee Police Department

**Captain Michael Gillooly**

Tucson Police Department  
Public Information

**Chief Ralph Godbee**

Detroit Police Department

**Mary Grady**

Los Angeles Police Department  
Public Information Director (former)

**Anthony Guglielmi**

Baltimore Police Department  
Director of Public Affairs

**Chief Jeffrey W. Halstead**

Fort Worth Police Department

**Assistant Chief Janeé Harteau**

Minneapolis Police Department

**Assistant Police Chief James Hawthorne**

Arlington Texas Police Department

**Lieutenant Paul Henderson**

Fort Worth Police Department

**Dr. Julie Hill**

Graduate School of Management &  
Technology

University of Maryland University College  
Professor and Program Director

**Mary Ann Jennings**

Fairfax County Police Department  
Director, Public Information Office

**Assistant Chief John Meza**

Mesa Police Department

**Sergeant Sammy Morris**

Cleveland Division of Police  
Public Information Officer

**Senior Director Paul Patterson**

Vancouver Police Department  
Community and Public Affairs

**Officer Matthew Porter**

San Antonio Police Department

**Director Mark Pugash**

Toronto Police Service  
Corporate Communications

**Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey**

Philadelphia Police Department  
President, Major Cities Chiefs

**Tiara Richard**

Arlington Police Department  
Media Relations Coordinator

**Anna Sabana**

Austin Police Department  
Public Information Manager

**Anne Schwartz**

Milwaukee Police Department  
Communications Director

**Assistant Chief Heston Silbert**

Mesa Police Department

**Captain Paul Starks**

Montgomery County Police Department  
Director – Media Services

**Darrel Stephens**

Major Cities Chiefs  
Executive Director

**Erica Van Ross**

St. Louis Missouri Police Department  
Director of Public Information

**Captain Steve Young**

Kansas City Missouri Police Department  
Commander - Media Relations Office

**Sergeant Sean Whitcomb**

Seattle Police Department  
Media Response Unit

**Patricia Williams**

Major Cities Chiefs

**Karima Zedan**

Philadelphia Police Department  
Director of Communications

## Appendix B: Developing the Core Message

### WHAT IS THE AGENCY'S CORE MESSAGE?

The core message is the essential piece of information that the agency wants to convey in everything it does. It is the message that sets the department apart from other units of government and other law enforcement agencies.

The core message is not the mission. It is not the employees' oath of office. It is not political dialogue. And, it is not the "flavor of the day" rhetoric.

Developing a core message is not a simple process. It is more challenging, thoughtful, and time consuming to develop a one sentence core message than a lengthy discourse on the department's mission and activities.

The agency's core message must fit the community the agency serves. It has to be realistic and void of hyperbole. It speaks to what the agency is or believes, not what it intends to do.

The core message must communicate that the agency exists for the people. It should communicate clearly that the agency advocates on behalf of the people and community. It has to communicate why the people should believe in the agency. If well-crafted, the core message can be an invaluable tool in developing relationships and opening the door to dialogue about the agency's activities and needs.<sup>2</sup>

In developing the agency's core message, the chief of police or sheriff should consider the following questions:

- Why does the agency exist?
- What is the department committed to doing?
- What value does the community derive from the department?
- What is the department's niche?
- What is unique or exceptional about the service the agency provides?

Good communication does not mean that you have to speak in perfectly formed sentences and paragraphs. It isn't about slickness. Simple and clear go a long way.

—John Kotter

2. Duncan, T., and S. Moriarty. 1998. A Communication-Based Marketing Model for Managing Relationships. *Journal of Marketing* 62:13.

The core message is brief, powerful, and memorable. In most cases, it is no more than one or two sentences.

- We build and sustain the community through the delivery of quality public safety services.
- We safeguard all people and protect them from crime, injury, disorder, and fear.
- We protect and serve.
- We are first and foremost human problem solvers.
- We are an integral part of the community and are committed to the well being, growth, and rights of its people.
- We support people in living their lives to the fullest without interference by those who would cause them harm.
- We are committed to making this the best place for people to live, work, visit, and raise a family.
- We serve the people by providing quality response to routine and extraordinary situations, preventing harm, solving problems, pursuing innovation, and operating in a fiscally responsible manner.

Once developed, the core message should be showcased on the agency's website and in news releases and other communications. It should be included in all departmental literature, used in public presentations by agency personnel, and incorporated into recruiting documents.

Review the core message frequently. Some experts suggest that the agency's core message should be reconsidered every 6-to-12 months.

The core message should stand alone. It should not require lengthy explanation or support documentation. If the people in the community, employees, and media representatives do not understand and commit to it quickly, it is the wrong core message and should be adjusted.

Responsibility for crafting the core message rests with the chief of police or sheriff. It is not a task that should be passed off to the public information or public affairs officer or a member of the command staff. Key stakeholders, such as members of the command staff, patrol officers, civilian employees, and labor leaders, should have input to framing the core message, but they must see that the chief or sheriff has taken the lead in crafting the words. If anyone else is seen as taking the lead, the message will not be fully accepted or supported internally.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Darrel W. Stephens.** Stephens was appointed the Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association on October 1, 2010. He also is a member of the faculty of the Public Safety Leadership Program in the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University where he has served as an Instructor since June, 2008.

He is an accomplished police executive with over 40 years of experience. His career began as a police officer in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1968. In addition to his police experience he served for 2 years as the City Administrator in St. Petersburg, Florida—a community of 250,000 people—where he was responsible for a work force of approximately 3,000 employees and a budget of \$380 million. He has 22 years experience in a police executive capacity including almost 9 years (from September 1999 to June 2008) as the Chief of Police of the 2,100 member Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD). In addition, he served as the Executive Director of the Police Executive Research Forum from 1986 until 1992.

Perhaps best known for advancing innovative approaches to policing, Stephens has earned a national reputation as a leader in policing. He served as the President, Vice President, and Legislative Committee Chair of the Major Cities Police Chiefs Association while Chief in Charlotte. Throughout his career, he has taken on difficult and challenging opportunities, and championed strategic technology investments to enhance employee productivity.

He has written extensively about policing, frequently consults with government officials on policing issues, and is a strong advocate of progressive policing approaches. He received the Police Executive Research Forum's Leadership Award and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences O.W. Wilson Award. He was elected a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration in 2005 and frequently is called on to participate in study panels. In 2006 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws Degree from Central Missouri State University. He was inducted into the Evidence Based Policing Hall of Fame in 2010 and also received the Distinguished Achievement Award Evidence Based Crime Policy.

**Julie Hill, Ph.D.** Hill is Professor and Director of the Public Relations and Criminal Justice programs in the Graduate School of the University of Maryland University College where, after her second semester of teaching, she was nominated for the University's award for teaching excellence. Prior to her appointment there, Hill spent most of her career in local government public affairs, first as the Corporate Communications Director for the City of Charlotte, North Carolina, and then as Public Affairs Director for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.

Hill started her professional life as an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at UNC Charlotte where she established the public relations program. Throughout her career, she has been a consultant and trainer in communications, team building, and management for a variety of public and private sector organizations. Hill developed and delivered the community engagement training as part of the Suspicious Activity Reporting project, working with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies across the country to develop common processes for terrorism-related reporting.

Hill is a member of the Public Relations Society of America and the National Capitol Chapter. She received an undergraduate degree in theatre management from Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts, a M.S. in Theatre Arts Management, and a Ph.D. in Interpersonal and Public Communication from Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

**Sheldon F. Greenberg, Ph.D.** Greenberg is Associate Dean of the School of Education and Associate Professor of Management at Johns Hopkins University (JHU). In this capacity, he directs the Johns Hopkins Police Executive Leadership Program, U.S. Secret Service Executive Development Program, Intelligence Analysis Program, and Homeland Security Leadership Program. For two years, he served as Associate Dean and Director of the JHU Division of Business and Management. Prior to joining JHU he served as Associate Director of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) in Washington, D.C. Greenberg began his career as an officer in the Howard County, Maryland, PD, where he served as a patrol officer, criminal investigator, supervisor of the youth unit, director of the police academy, director of research and planning, assistant to the chief of police, and commander of the administrative services bureau. He currently serves on the National Council on Domestic Intelligence and is a principal investigator for the Department of Homeland Security Center for Excellence on Preparedness and Catastrophic Event Response (PACER). He is author of three books and numerous articles.



*Strategic Communication Practices: A Toolkit for Police Executives* was developed to help police executives communicate more effectively with their communities and organizations. It addresses the changes in the news media and how that has affected the way people obtain information. It is designed to provide greater insight into communications strategies and planning. It provides examples of strategic communications plans and how police have used various communications tools to more effectively reach their community. It is a companion piece and builds on the 2010 Major Cities Chiefs Association/COPS Office white paper, *Key Leadership Strategies to Enhance Communication*.



**COPS**

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
145 N Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20530

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

Visit COPS Online at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)

e081129395  
ISBN: 978-1-935676-41-6  
September 2011