

Crime Analysis and Community-based Policing: Mere Reflections in the Same Mirror

Bryan Hill
Crime Analyst
Glendale Police Department
6835 N 57th Drive
Glendale, AZ 85301
(623) 930-3073
bhill@ci.glendale.az.us

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One of the questions that have been asked in oral interviews over the past decade has been worded similar to, “what does Community-based Policing mean to you?” Many creative responses have been spoken to oral board members, but all statements likely have a few common components as follows:

1. Police using what they know to make a positive impact in a neighborhood
2. Involving the public with the police to make *lasting changes*
3. Improving the “*quality of life*” for all involved in the process

These concepts sound very simple, however implementing them within some agencies proves to be more difficult. In the early part of the 1990’s, the Phoenix Police Department embarked on the Community-based Policing path. There were a number of growing pains, but two of them that seemed most evident were the questions of

- 1) How do we get the public to support our enforcement efforts in a neighborhood?
- 2) Where do we get the data to show we have been “*successful*” in an area?

The first question was answered through innovative programs and the resourcefulness of the officers creating action plans and responding to an area with their desire to make a difference. It is my feeling that the officers who made the Community-based Policing philosophy a part of their daily duties are the ones that made the programs, and effectiveness of them, occur so widely throughout the department. The second question was not so easy to address. What was a Community-based Policing report? What kind of information was important to consider when evaluating the success of a tactical action plan? How do we know if the success we report lasts over time or is it just the cockroach approach? (*This term was coined by Commander Emmett Quill, Phoenix PD, several years ago. His analogy to some action plans, was that criminals were like cockroaches coming out in the dark and creating havoc. They seemingly act freely doing whatever it is cockroaches do while still in the dark. When you dump several officers into a high crime or problem area, (simulating the turning on of a bright light), the criminals (cockroaches) scatter into the woodwork, or “disperse” to other areas which aren’t so bright.*)

This idea is also supported with the way most police departments likely reported their successes and failures. What did they do when they were in an area, *or while turning on the bright light*? Many of the reports created indicate that while the action plan was being put into action, x number of people were arrested, x number of warrants were served, x number of community meetings were attended, etc.. Does this type of reporting tell police when their Community-based

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Policing effort was successful, or simply give an account of the time spent in an area? This is where crime analysis seems to have taken a large jump in the law enforcement community. It appears that like voice recording and video taping of arrests, crime analysis surged as a valuable tool in the crime-fighting arsenal. This didn't come easily to some departments, and may still be lacking in others. The value of crime analysis in any Community-based Policing model is a no-brainer. I believe that Steven Gottlieb makes the same point in the foreword of his book, "Crime Analysis: from first report to final arrest" (Alpha Publishing, ISBN: 0-9634773-0-7, 1994). The following remarks come directly from this well-known publication:

"The question is, do today's law enforcement executives have sufficient awareness of why they should change and do they have the will to do so? Do they have the intestinal fortitude to oppose the status quo?"

Some do; the evidence is the movement toward Community or Problem-Oriented Policing. But if analysis of a crime problem in the neighborhood or community is at the heart of the concept, it has been either too little understood or discussed. How can Community or Problem-Oriented Policing – or their variants – possibly succeed without understanding or utilizing crime analysis?"

We have all heard of the "SARA" model for Community-based Policing and know that these 4 letters stand for:

- Scanning (Finding information and data to identify a problem in an area)
- Analysis (Analyze the data and form an action plan)
- Respond (Put your action plan into effect in an area and modify it as needed to be successful)
- Assess (Assess the value of your action plan and evaluate the success or failure of the program you put into action)

It is with the Assess portion of the SARA model that a police department will struggle with on a daily basis. Although this article offers no specific advice on how to wrestle this problem to the ground, it will describe how integral crime analysis is to the SARA model process.

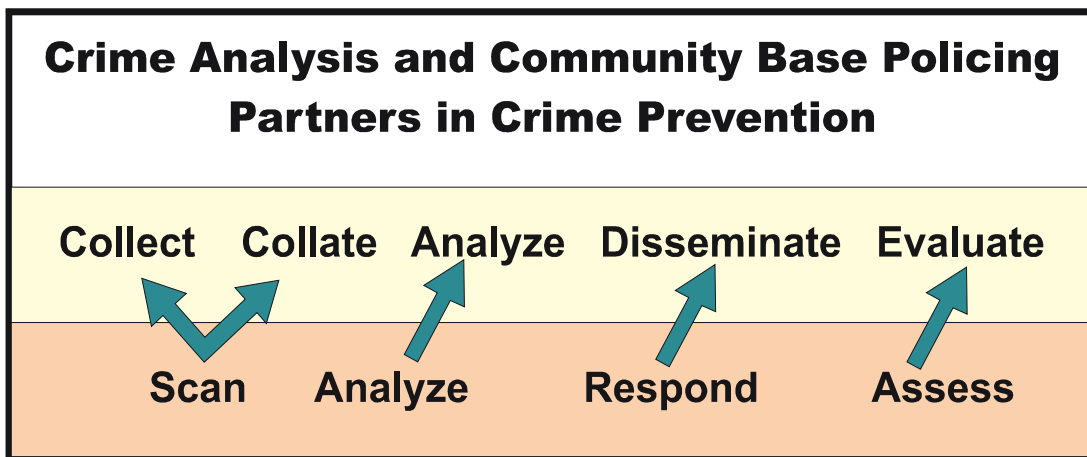
Although often worded differently across the globe, all crime analysts have heard that crime analysis has five stages, or steps. The five stages used for this article are described as follows:

- Collect (Collect the data needed to identify patterns, series, etc from your systems)

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- Collate (Sort and organize the data so that you can make sense of it all)
- Analyze (Analyze the date/time/DOW patterns in the data and any other analysis that may be needed to adequately identify a problem or area that can be addressed)
- Disseminate (Send your report to the customers utilizing your crime analysis products for action)
- Evaluate (Ask for feedback on how the report could be improved, or evaluate the crime analysis product and it's success in an operational environment)

The following diagram shows how closely the SARA model, and the five stages of crime analysis, link up and create a symbiotic bond within a law enforcement agency when applied correctly.



In short, Community-based Policing and the SARA model IS CRIME ANALYSIS. The appropriate use of administrative, strategic, and tactical analysis products to identify and SCAN for problems within a jurisdiction begins the process. The crime analyst's coaxing of data from the RMS system provides the data, analysis, goals, and objectives for Community-based Policing, when applied within a department. The reports that are then generated by the crime analyst can be used to plan a response to a crime problem or geographic area. While the action plan is being acted upon, the crime analyst can provide up to date information and analysis on the effect of the enforcement activity. The action plan can be modified if dispersion (or the cockroach method) starts to occur.

Once the action plan's steps have been completed, the crime analyst can then evaluate the crime problem or geographic area through mapping and other analysis products to see if there was lasting change in an area, or simply while the enforcement plan was being put into force.

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A crime analyst may not be able to directly link the enforcement methods of a particular plan as the “cause” for a reduction in crime in an area. However, they can provide the expertise to continually evaluate the success of the department’s goals. Thus, the quality of life issue that all Community-based Policing goals are measured by can be evaluated over and over again. Allowing for new standard operating procedures to be established when needed. Because the analyst is constantly in the “evaluate” mode of their work products, change can not only be dealt with as they appear, but in addition, new methods and old methods applied in a new way can be developed to assist the police department in meeting its Community-based Policing objectives.

Community-based Policing and Crime Analysis techniques are synonymous when used correctly within an agency. The faster a police agency can apply crime analysis techniques and methods to its Community-based Policing arsenal, the quicker they will be able to see the reflection of success.