

Protests, at times violent, following the May 25, 2020 murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer and several deaths of individuals resulting from encounters with police fueled a movement to change the way the police operate. There were calls to defund the police (headcount/operational budgets) and remove certain responsibilities from law enforcement officers (i.e., mental health calls, homeless individuals, enforcement of minor traffic violations, etc.) and assign these responsibilities to mental health and other professionals believed better prepared to resolve these matters. This movement also called for increased police transparency and accountability for their actions and a demand for a policing style more responsive to the community.

Police-community relations have suffered in many communities due to police use of excessive force and the gap/disconnect between police and the communities they serve has increased. Attempts to reduce police headcounts and operational budgets continue in some parts of the United States (despite an uptick in crime) and there are local legislative efforts to increase police transparency and accountability. Interest in policing as a profession and its related academic disciplines of study are waning. College enrollments in Criminal Justice and related majors has shown a drastic reduction in recent years, and recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers are increasingly difficult (PERF, 2023). There is also the trail of missed opportunities when sometimes programs start with vigor but lose momentum leaving behind unfinished projects and disillusion (Cheng, 2019).

The dynamic political and social environment and shifting public sentiment concerning police policies and practices present an excellent opportunity to explore the process by which the police deal with the communities they serve. A single paper is insufficient to discuss the complex, interdisciplinary and intersectional issues associated with police-community relations as they relate to police policies and practices in the communities they serve. There are numerous books and scholarly articles that explore police-community relations, customer satisfaction, customer engagement practices, etc. at a granular level. While that type of examination is better suited for the study of policing in a democratic society, this text is intended as an awareness level guide for city/town managers and/or police leaders (public safety practitioners).

At their core, businesses, and commercial enterprises exist to make money from the products or services that they provide. Those who use/consume those products or services

create revenue and potential revenue for these businesses. How well a business meets its customers' needs and how it can grow its customer base is important to its success. As such, the way in which businesses engage their customers and/or grow its customer base is a dominant theme and unifying thread interwoven throughout the entire business or enterprise. The business of policing/public safety and the police organizations that deliver these services are not profit centers. They spend much more money than they generate. That said, police agencies must operate efficiently (financially) and effectively (quality of outcomes of services delivered). Like businesses and other commercial enterprises, the needs and desires of consumers of public safety services must be an organizational priority. Policy making and operational decision-making must be informed by and tailored to meet the varied needs of the communities and consumers it serves. The initial question for the police agency is who are its customers and what are their needs? The first question is simple, anyone present within the geographical jurisdiction of the police agency is a potential consumer of their services. However, not everyone within their geographical jurisdiction will consume their services. The second question, what do these consumers need from the police agency. Concerns among those who live, work, recreation or visit within a department's jurisdiction can vary from person to person, block to block, neighborhood to neighborhood and community to community. The metrics used internally by police leaders to assess organizational performance do not always align with the metrics used by consumers to determine how well or not that agency is meeting their needs.

Before delving into the discussion of police operational performance when it comes to community engagement, it is important to identify what we mean by the phrase "community engagement." What is the community? What does it mean to engage? The term engagement is purposively selected to describe the level of association among police departments and their respective communities. Government officials in the public safety space (City Managers, Police Chiefs etc.) undoubtedly recognize that there are degrees of association that various members of the community exhibit with their local police department. We also intentional use the word "engage" to signal that police departments should have a more intense and more deliberate association with the community and not just be "involved." According to the Merriam-Websters Dictionary "involvement" denotes recurring participation and interest in certain things, where "engagement" denotes attraction and interlocking with another person. For example, when we ask another person to wed, and they agree, we call that an "engagement" which implies a more intense, more

serious, and long-term relationship. Involvement implies participation with the community in certain processes and events and a more superficial form of relationship. Therefore, involvement implies “doing to” and engagement involves “doing with” and implies a shared and continuous responsibility for operational performance. We argue here that police departments must engage with their communities and develop a strategic approach to improve operational performance. In other words, we recommend that police departments take the view that they must be fully engaged with the communities they serve, develop the plans and programs, and commit the resources, to support this engagement. This is more than “being involved” in community relations or public relations campaigns; more than simply hosting “coffee with a cop” events or proclaiming your department does “Community Policing” by having Bicycle Patrols. We envision a more robust and comprehensive approach to providing police service that involves the spectrum of communities served by police departments.

So, what do we mean by the term “community”? For the purposes of this discussion, we envision communities to exist across two dimensions: internal and external communities. In addition, each dimension can be described by two categories: transactional communities and stakeholders. Figure 1 illustrates these dimensions.

Figure 10.1 - Community Dimensions

COMMUNITY DIMENSIONS		COMMUNITY TYPE	
		TRANSACTIONAL	STAKEHOLDER
LOCUS	INTERNAL	Officers	Employee Groups, Units
	EXTERNAL	“Customers” 911 Callers	Community Groups

External communities

An external community is defined as people or groups outside the police organization. This is the common understanding of the definition of “community” when it comes to policing. It is the people, groups, organizations, etc. that deal with the police on a regular basis. However, discussions about the police and communities are often limited to communities that exist “outside” of the department, in other words, groups or people that are not police employees, groups or police officers.

Internal Community

We are making the argument that consideration must be given to the needs of internal communities. These are the groups or people that work in police organizations that require the same attention and strategic approach to manage and engage.

Transactional Community

There are “transactional” members of both communities. Members of the external transactional community are people or groups that, from time to time, request police services. This could be 911 callers, victims, witnesses, visitors to the police facility, etc. They engage the police in a transactional way: request services and move on.

From an internal perspective, this community is the actual members of the police organization. Police and governmental managers responsible for the operations of police departments must also view their employees in the context of them being a transactional community that needs identification and attention.

In the private sector, the external transactional community would be considered a

customer. The private sector is very deliberate and thoughtful in determining who its customers are (and could/should be) and how best to meet the needs of current and potential consumers. The success of the business depends upon it. Companies go to great lengths and expense to identify their customer-base and potential customers (to grow that customer-base). Competition among providers of similar products or services can be intense as they pursue the same consumer pool. The US constitution and Declaration of Independence make clear the responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of a nation's people rests solidly with the government. The "take care" clause and similar language found in the federal and many state constitutions task the Executive branch of government to enforce laws, etc. to accomplish among other things public safety. Municipal/local, county/equivalent, and state entities are the government providers of public safety services. They are the emergency first responders to incidents within their geographical areas. Most often, federal agencies are secondary responders.

Unlike the private sector, public sector agencies face limited competition from peer public sector agencies. The government (i.e., municipal, county, state or federal) in a sense maintains a near monopoly on providing public safety services. The private sector does not and cannot offer the equivalent services in terms of quality and quantity (i.e., cannot leverage the coercive powers of the state in a similar manner as a government itself etc.) to be considered a meaningful alternative to the public sector provider.

Police departments should consider every member of the transactional community it serves as a potential customer. While every person within the jurisdiction of a police agency is a customer, not all consumers use public safety services and of those that do, not all consume them equally.

It is a simple process for police agencies to determine who is using their services. Computer-Aided-Dispatch (CAD) data, Incident Reports, Vehicle Crash Reports, Juvenile Reports, Arrest Reports, and other data collected during the normal course of business help identify the department's actual consumers. How these customers are treated is very important and police departments should consider the police-community transaction as an opportunity to improve their performance. In other words, while they may be transactional in nature, short-term and incident driven, there is a potential to influence their attitudes and opinions about the police and engaging them from this perspective is an important strategic

approach that needs to be embraced.

The private sector has also recognized the need to engage their employees and ensure they are satisfied in their roles. There is a recognition that even though customers are the ones generating business, they would not do it as readily if it were not for the employees. Companies that put their employees' welfare first, and their customers second enjoy enormous success. (Burkus, 2016; Platner, 2020). In any service industry, investing in the employee is an avenue to provide excellent customer service. Policing is a service industry, and employees represent the largest investment most police departments make, yet little attention is paid to their well-being. The *President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* recognized this and challenged police departments across the country to examine and improve officer well-being. We submit here that as an internal transactional community, police department employee well-being should be subject to a strategic management approach to improving operations similar to the other dimensions of community engagement.

Stakeholders

"Stakeholders" are people or groups in the community that could potentially have a sustained and long-term relationship with the department. Community groups, block associations, elected officials, civic, religious, or business organizations, local schools, etc. would be considered stakeholders. These groups are organized for a specific purpose, generally have a leadership and organizational structure, meet regularly, and depending on their mission, require services from the police. Some groups exert greater influence than others: the Mayor or the City Council obviously is a more prominent stakeholder than a local block association, but all stakeholders require deliberate attention to foster long-term relationships. All stakeholders matter.

There are several ways to organize those who have used, are currently using, may use, or have a vested interest in the services offered by public safety service providers. Public safety consumers/stakeholders can occupy one or more categories. When useful, public safety consumers can be categorized geographically, by demographics, affiliation, interests,

goals, etc. Each category contains numerous subcategories, and their interests/concerns range from the simple to the complex and at times compete with one another. However, knowing who your customers are does not necessarily inform you of their varied needs. After the police agency identifies its customers/stakeholders (everyone), the consumers/stakeholders should be organized and reorganized by the police agency in ways that makes sense to facilitate engagement. Organizing stakeholders in multiple ways facilitates outreach, information sharing and targeted engagement. All consumers/stakeholders are important to the agency. Their strengths, frailties and interests vary, and departments must take this into account when developing messaging strategies and engagement decisions/practices. For example, elected officials are representatives of the geographical area from which they were elected. Elected officials have a platform that comes with their office, can exercise great influence among their votes/supporters and may even exercise direct oversight over agencies, their personnel or their budget. Elected officials can be very helpful in acting as a conduit to obtain from and disseminate information to constituents, particularly in times of a police-involved incident, crisis, or unrest. Engaging elected officials must be regular, purposeful, and strategic. This includes regular updates on public safety or other agency matters. The mode of communication will often depend on the information being conveyed. Routine, non-controversial matters could be the subject of an email blast. As the volatility, significance, or importance of the matter increases, a more personal mode of communication must be considered (i.e., an email or text message may not be read immediately, etc.). Elected officials should be appraised of or briefed about important matters before the information is disclosed to the public at large or media. You want to avoid having an elected official being contacted on an important or emerging public safety matter by a constituent or media outlet without that elected official having been appraised of or briefed by your agency on the matter. When elected officials are knowledgeable on matters, they are better positioned to speak with authority about a matter based on facts and not rumor or speculation. Moreover, elected officials can address immediately and dispel false or misinformation and become a trusted source of information who is also influential in the community. It goes without saying that the agency's response to elected officials' inquiries must be timely, and comprehensive. Good practice requires police leaders to tell elected officials what they know (within the bounds of the law and that which will not unnecessarily impede an ongoing criminal investigation), what they do not know and what their next steps will be.

While there is little need for police agencies to undertake efforts like the private sector to identify its consumers/stakeholders, it must however invest resources to ascertain the current and future needs of its consumers. Data from the local planning office, Census Bureau, schools, etc. can be helpful in terms of projecting population growth, demographic shifts, economic development, socioeconomic shifts, etc. These indicators can inform decision making in terms of positioning your department today for the emerging needs of tomorrow. A simple way to determine the current and future needs of your customers is to ask your customers. Surveys are informative in terms of customer satisfaction, perceptions, needs and how to align the services offered with customer needs.

Community Engagement Strategies

People committed to police community engagement strategies need to consider this topic from an internal/external and transactional/stakeholder perspectives. The following is a brief discussion on various tactics that can be used to improve operational performance in this area. The various approaches mentioned here need to be used in context with the department's organizational identity, strategic goals, and communications approach discussed above. The tactics provided below are not "quick fixes" or "one-shot deal" but should be viewed as potential elements to a comprehensive community engagement strategy for the entire department.

A. Internal-Transactional

As discussed above, employee well-being is essential for effective performance and should be viewed as one of the main elements of a departments community engagement strategy. If you were to ask the ordinary officer assigned to patrol in most police departments in the U.S. "how is morale?" You will get the response: "Morale has never been worse that it is today." Ironically, even within the current "national police crisis" related to a widespread perceived lack of trust and support for the police, the issue of police morale is always thought to be low. The issue of low morale within police departments is a timeless tradition that is a function of the nature of the work, the subculture of the profession, and the style of

management employed by police departments. However, officers on patrol are the department's single greatest resource. Personnel expenses are likely to be in excess of 85% of any police budget, and with more than 60% of the entire sworn complement of officers assigned to patrol, this results in approximately 50% of an entire police department's budget dedicated to officers on patrol. Considering the investment communities make in patrol operations, it is incumbent upon police and town managers to ensure that these officers are performing well, properly trained and supervised, properly equipped, and physically, mentally, and emotionally fit. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and officers undoubtedly report the perception of being the forgotten group in the department. The patronizing expression "backbone of policing," which is meant to describe the importance of patrol operations, pays lip-service to the reality of patrol. It is a difficult job, performed at all hours of the day and night, on weekends and holidays, with dangerous and sometimes fatal outcomes. Regular assessment of the individuals assigned to this important function is paramount.

According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, line-of-duty deaths were down 64% in 2022, from 623 in 2021 to 224 in 2022. Sixty-three of these 224 line-of-duty deaths were firearms-related, 46 were traffic-related, and strikingly, in 2022, there were also 228 suicides among law enforcement officers, which was a 33% increase from 2018 when there were 172 suicides. Seventy-eight percent more officers died by suicide than they did during all other line-of-duty incidents. It appears that officers are about five times more likely to die from their own firearms than from a firearm related incident from another person. To understand and address this alarming trend, PERF published a Critical Issues in Policing Series "An Occupational Risk: What Every Police Department Should Do to Prevent Suicide among Its Officers" in October of 2019. The causes and solutions to this epidemic are well beyond the scope of this section. However, while suicide and line-of-duty death are the ultimate price paid by police officers, departments can take meaningful and concrete measures to improve the overall mental health of officers, particularly officers assigned to patrol. These measures will not only improve officer well-being but will likely improve the quality of service they will provide the community (PERF, 2019).

Workplace stress is causing more harm to officers and communities. Stress is crippling the law enforcement profession. The psychological stress that comes with police work puts officers at significantly higher risk for long-term physical and mental health than the

general population. Officers are 4-times more likely to suffer sleep deprivation, have the poorest cardiovascular health than any occupation, with 40% obesity rates, and nearly double the rate of depression compared to the general population. In fact, police officers live 10 years less than the average person does in the U.S. Stress is literally killing the law enforcement profession. In addition, nowhere is this more acute than for officers on patrol.

For officers, this stress can come in many forms, from traumatic events experienced over a career to the “toxic” work environment that officers experience every day. In his seminal study of the police in the U.S., Wilson (1968) referred to the “dirty work” done by cops every day. They experience daily micro-traumas of victimization, injury, accidents, mental illness. This “dirty work” shapes the subculture of the profession and contributes to a hardened demeanor and a cynical outlook on the world. If not managed properly, these micro-traumas can lead to negative personal outcomes in the form of mental and physical illness, as well as the negative work-related outcomes in the form of inappropriate use of force, civilian complaints, discourtesy, and shoddy service.

Police departments are not going to be able to change the nature of police work. Police officers will always be called to emergency situations and must deal with trauma daily. However, the way a department manages the stress associated with this trauma can mitigate it and promote a healthy lifestyle. The adaptive strategies that a department engages in can make a difference. From a patrol perspective, those strategies should focus on communication, work-life balance, and assessment.

Communication - It might seem obvious that an open line of communication between the command staff and officers on patrol is essential. However, organizational communications with patrol are often dysfunctional. Most departments thrive on the “rumor mill” and officers working nights and weekends without direct contact with the administration rely on these types of informal communications systems to stay informed. Being “out of the loop” can be stressful and exacerbate an already stressful job. Not knowing about policy or personnel changes, or disciplinary decisions, or training opportunities, is a source of great frustration for officers on patrol. Not only do officers on patrol get excluded from the decision-making process, but a perception of unfairness creeps into these processes. Untethered from the conventional day-to-day management processes also aggravates the sense of social isolation experienced by officers on patrol. More, and accurate, information

needs to be communicated and police managers should consider several mechanisms to facilitate this process:

Social Media - departments must leverage social media to keep officers informed and involved in department affairs. Anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection can check on their local happenings. We can access real-time information about world events from the palms of our hands. We have never had the ability to be so connected with the free flow of information. If the digital age can keep us informed and up-to-date with world events, departments should use this technology to keep officers informed about department events. Moreover, officers should not be viewed as mere passive recipients of information from the department, but active participants that should be engaged in policy development and a myriad of other issues that face police departments. Global emails to all officers are not an effective way of communicating with personnel. There are numerous ways that two-way flow of information can be facilitated, and departments need to explore these media to promote organizational effectiveness and officer well-being.

Group meetings and interpersonal contact - When patrol officers think about the command staff in police departments several disparaging concepts come to mind:

“The 2nd Floor Boys” (ranking officers sequestered in their offices on the second floor of headquarters)

“Carpet Land” (executive offices are carpeted while all others are not)

“Cowboy Typist” (cop that dresses the part but sits at a desk all day)

“Stealth Chief” (the boss that is never seen on patrol)

These expressions illustrate the perception that police management is disconnected from the actual work done by patrol. Patrol operations cannot be led or managed from an office during business hours. Communications with officers need to be as personal as possible. In large organizations, this presents challenges. It would be impossible for the Police Commissioner in the NYPD, for example, to foster interpersonal communications with 50,000 employees, or the approximately 20,000 officers on patrol. This challenge is less in a

department of 25 employees, but nonetheless, a system of personal communication needs to be established to personalize the message and the messenger. Police managers, especially those responsible for patrol operations, need to manage and lead from the street and not the office. Officers need to be communicated with in person to the greatest extent possible, and forums need to be established where interpersonal communications can be established. Monthly shift meetings, periodic focus groups, department-wide “town hall” meetings should all be considered to improve communications. Employees should be encouraged to participate, minutes should be taken, and decisions should be clearly articulated and communicated to the officers.

24×7 executive patrol coverage - Ask the average officer “how often do you see the chief?” and the likely answer will be “Never.” The Chief and the command staff need to be visible on patrol. Does the chief and command staff wear a uniform? Do they work nights, weekends, and holidays? The answer to all these questions should be a resounding YES. Some mechanism, no matter how big or small the department, should be created to ensure a regular and frequent presence of the chief and command staff in patrol operations. Their presence is critical to ensure that patrol operations are carried out efficiently and effectively, as well as creating an open and direct line of communications between the rank-and-file patrol officers and the command staff.

Promote Work-Life Balance - Police departments should take an active interest in promoting a healthy work-life balance. This is meant to include all aspects of health: physical, mental, emotional. The nature and quality of the type of program implemented is as important as including officers in its design. Officers should be encouraged to develop programs that promote nutritional health and recuperative sleep. Does the department’s shift schedule include ample time off, and ample time between shifts? Are officers required to work excessive overtime, or secondary employment jobs? Do these interfere with their ability to eat right and get enough sleep?

Does the department promote physical health for the officers on patrol? Is there time allocated before, during, or after work to engage in physical fitness. Many departments prohibit officers from working out during their shift. Perhaps this is for good reason, but is there a way to accommodate fitness during the shift to promote health? In addition, what about emotional fitness? Are officers encouraged to foster a stable network of friends and

family that can support them as a buffer to stress? Social connectedness has been shown to be a greater predictor of longevity than any other single lifestyle factor. What does your department do to promote officer sociability? Social connectedness can also promote positive police-community relations. Developing programs that allow officers to volunteer or otherwise connect with the community they serve can promote officer mental health and community relationships. When the community sees the police in a positive light this adds to their legitimacy and will foster relationships that are more positive. Every police department needs to develop and implement a health and wellness plan for officers on patrol (and all police officers regardless of assignment). This plan should be created with the active participation of patrol officers and medical and psychological professionals and updated regularly to support the officer's well-being.

Assessing Officer Well-Being - It's one thing to promote officer well-being, it's another thing altogether to measure and track that well-being. The overall effectiveness of an employee wellness plan is a function of the department's ability to assess the outcome of that plan. Quantitative and qualitative measures need to be identified by the department to track employee well-being. It is incumbent upon police managers to make this a central part of their mission. To accomplish this goal a combination of direct and indirect measures should be considered.

Indirect Measures - These types of measures are typically included in a department's Early Intervention System (EIS). An EIS is a personnel management tool designed to identify and mitigate performance and behavior-related issues that are interfering with organizational goals and officer well-being. EISs are repositories of data on a wide array of performance indicators, such as uses of force, resisting arrest charges, civilian complaints, absence and lateness records, sick-time usage, line-of-duty injuries, motor vehicle accidents, poor performance ratings, and so on. These data points act as a "dashboard" of indicators that could signal performance or behavioral problems. In November 2018, The National Policing Institute published a report on the "Best Practices in Early Intervention System Implementation and Use." This report discusses the use of these indicators and stresses the role of managers and supervisors in the process. There are no "perfect" EIS, but the ones that are most successful employ an integrated approach that makes EIS as part of an overall performance management system along with appropriate strategies to assist officers in need.

Police departments need to implement EIS as an indirect measure of officer well-being. CALEA accreditation standards require this type of system, and EIS is considered an integral part of effective personnel management. Does your department have an EIS? Is it used effectively? Do the officers believe the system to be credible and helpful or punitive and disciplinary in nature? Creating an indirect measure of employee well-being is not just good management, it is essential.

Direct Measures - These types of measures involve data that is collected directly from the officer. These measures can be both quantitative and qualitative. The most valid way to assess an officer's well-being is to ask directly. Employee surveys can provide a valid and quantitative measure of well-being. Anonymous surveys, however, will not isolate officers in distress, therefore, caution must be exercised using them. This methodology is rarely used in police management, but departments that use survey instruments find opportunities to improve the overall work-life in the organization. The worst thing a police manager can do though is to ask for officers' feedback, and then do nothing with it. Departments that use surveys to assess officer well-being must be prepared to act on the information collection. Not responding to the officers' feedback reinforces the cynical outlook already fostered by the work.

Qualitative direct measures would be in the form of actual interviews, conversations, observations, or focus group meetings with officers on patrol. This approach goes together with the recommendation to be more visibly present with the officers on patrol. Ride along in their patrol cars, back them up on emergency assignments, and speak to them before and after roll call or when they are booking prisoners. There is no good or bad time to "check-in" with officers to find out how they are doing. The more police managers engage in this approach the more open officers will become. Doing perfunctory or one-off interactions will not solicit the same level of information nor communicate the care and concern that this approach can create. It is common for police managers to meet individually with every member of their department periodically. Similarly, frequent, and regular focus groups with rank-and-file officers facilitated properly can generate an enormous amount of information about the needs and attitudes of the officers.

Again, the exact approach is less important than engaging this method in the first place. Each police department and police manager will gravitate towards his or her preferred

method. Implement the key take-away that some method of direct measurement of officer well-being, both quantitative and qualitative is needed. The data collected through these methodologies can then be combined with the indirect measure to understand the individual and collective well-being of officers in the department. Armed with this information, plans can be developed and implemented along the lines of the ones discussed above to improve officer well-being.

There is no greater resource in any police department than the officers. That resource needs to be protected, cultivated, and managed for improved performance in the form of officer well-being, police-community relations, and effective crime reduction, traffic safety, and disorder control. Every police department needs a well-articulated plan in this area to improve organizational communications and promote a healthy and positive work-life balance. In addition, these areas need to be measured and tracked regularly through an integrated mix of indirect and direct measures. The foundation of a successful plan rests on an active and engaged command staff and first-line supervisors. Creating a visible and open cadre of managers and supervisors is essential to the overall success of this plan.

B. Internal-Stakeholder

Labor Management - The topic of police labor management relations is a complex one. It is estimated that approximately 80% of police officers in the United States are represented by a Union, Police Officer Association, or employee group (DeLord and York, 2017). Dealing with difficult personnel matters and collective bargaining agreements requires great skill and often occupies a great deal of time from all parties involved. This paper does not intend to delve into the specific structures of these complex problems, however, there must be a recognition on the part of the department itself that internal stakeholders are an important part of the “community” that needs to be engaged. Again, there needs to be a positive and long-term relationship between the police department and the internal stakeholder communities to benefit the overall success of the entire organization. Without this balanced approach, a strategy of community engagement would not be accomplished.

The approach recommended to effectively engage internal stakeholders is similar to the approach recommended for external stakeholders and rests on three straightforward

principles: recognition, communication, and results.

Recognition - In areas of the U.S. police unions have legal standing to represent the employment interests of their members. They are legally recognized and must be engaged on a wide variety of matters that impact police officers employment. The legal designation provides for a formal recognition of them as police officer representatives. Regardless of whether or not an employee group benefits from official legal status, police departments must “recognize” the groups and leadership of those groups that intend to represent the employees of the organization. This transcends collective bargaining and legal representation during internal investigations. This approach requires that employee groups receive the recognition they deserve as interested stakeholders in the well-being of the people they represent.

In many respects, when police officers are formally represented by a Union or POA the recognition of the groups is simple. The group exists and there is a formal relationship between it and the department. However, there are other departments that do not have such formally recognized groups and it is incumbent on the department to create an environment where stakeholder groups are formed. The main goal of these groups (formal or informal) is to promote the well-being of the officers in the department. Organizing and engaging police officers to commit to the betterment of their work conditions is a critical component of any police departments mission.

Communication - It is not enough just to ensure that employee groups are recognized. Police departments must develop a robust means of communication between the parties. Research has shown that better internal communication is key to improving police officer morale (Police1, 2022) The foundation of internal stakeholder communications rests on a strategic approach that is grounded in trust and openness. This approach is deeper and more involved than simply holding periodic meetings or managing disputes or contract negotiations. The implication here is that an effective communications strategy creates relationships committed to inform a community of advocates. The police chief or the command staff alone cannot foster the well-being of officers in the department. They need a team of people and groups committed to the same goal. This will promote well-being, safety, and undoubtedly provide better services to the community (Pal, J., C Khadijah, E. Kowalczyk, and C. Townsend, 2023). Open and regular communication with internal

stakeholders is essential and police departments must explore all avenues in this regard. Text chains, social media, periodic meetings, direct face-to-face meetings, etc. can all be used to communicate with internal department stakeholders. There is no preferred way except to ensure that communication is part of a strategic plan to keep people and groups informed about the issues they care about most.

Results - Nothing succeeds like success^[1] and winning cures all problems^[2]. The purpose of achieving results as a part of internal stakeholder engagement is the essence of this approach. Groups organize for a reason; police departments included. Police officers, and their efforts, are the primary tool that police departments have to achieve their goals. Providing those individuals with the things they think they need to accomplish their personal goals is the most effective method of achieving the departments' goals. In other words, their success as individuals promotes the overall success of the department.

Employee groups are involved with the individual needs of their members, therefore, promoting the success of the employee group and providing what it wants promotes the overall success of the department. This indirectly impacts the department's "bottom-line." Again, the philosophy here is that a satisfied police officer will provide better service to the community and that internal stakeholders are an instrumental part of that satisfaction. Attending to the needs of the group and helping work towards positive results promotes officer, group, and department success. Often, police managers view employee groups as adversaries. Perhaps, in certain respects they could be, but an effective community engagement strategy suggests that these groups be viewed as partners in the production of police officer well-being.

C. External - Transactional

External transactional communities are perhaps the least understood and most overlooked when it comes to the topic of community engagement. In some sense, the identification of them as a "community" would be considered controversial and misguided. They are the customers of policing services and the ones that occupy the most frequent and regular interactions with the police in any community. Engaging them as a community is admittedly a challenge, but a challenge that must be embraced.

The often quoted mantra of “protect and serve” as the mission of the police can be thought of the general framework for dealing with the external-transactional community. But what does it mean to “protect and serve?” Couper (2015) suggests that local police can be rated by examining the leadership, organization, and policy characteristic of the department. Although his approach has value understanding the organization of the department, it is only an indirect way of assessing the day-to-day interactions police officers have with the members of the public. These day-to-day interactions have powerful potential to influence public opinion about the police and happen to be the interactions police departments have the most control over. We suggest that police departments should engage in a rigorous process of assessing these interactions and using them as the foundation of a broader community engagement strategy.

Interactions with the public, whether it is during a call-for-service through 911, a traffic stop, or a visit to the police facility, should be as professional and productive as possible. In other words, people that interact with the police should have their problems solved (to the extent they can be solved by the police), in a fair, timely manner. At the core of the police role, however, is the use of force, either implied or actual, therefore, routine encounters with the police are often tense, coercive, and result in the negative application of the law. It is difficult indeed to produce “satisfied customers” when you are involved in interactions of this type.

In order to engage external transactional communities effectively, the police need to be viewed as legitimate. The police must enjoy the public’s trust and be supported in the overall belief that they have the authority to enforce the law they are empowered to enforce. This concept is known as procedural justice (Tyler, 1990; 2003), and there is a substantial body of evidence that suggests that the more legitimate the public views the police, the more likely they will be to obey the law (Bowers and Robinson, 2012). Above all things, police departments should develop policies and training programs that foster procedural justice to build and maintain the public trust.

A full discussion of procedural justice is well beyond the scope of this paper but the approach rests on developing the dynamics between the police and the public where members of the public believe they are being treated fairly, believe that the officer is being transparent with her actions, understand they have an opportunity to have their voice

heard, and believe that the officer is being impartial with her decisions (C.O.P.S., 2016). These principles of fairness, voice, transparency, and impartiality that we recommend for dealing with internal interactions inside a police department should be embraced when dealing with members of the community. How then can a police department ensure that its officers are engaging in the transactional external community with procedural justice and providing excellent services? We recommend several tools that should be leveraged to this extent. We also recommend that these tools not be leveraged to discipline or penalize officer misconduct but to promote the positive interactions officers have with the public every day.

Body-Worn Cameras (BWC) Assessment - The police use of BWCs in the U.S. has grown dramatically over the last decade. In 2020, almost 80% of all police officers in the U.S. were equipped with BWCs compared to only 32% in 2013. And in larger departments with 250 or more officers almost all of them have BWCs (Reaves, 2015; Goodison and Brooks, 2023).

In general, the research on police BWCs has been mixed. BWCs have been shown to reduce complaints against the police by the public (Lum et al, 2019), some studies shown a reduction in the use force (Braga et al, 2018), and others that show possible effects with regards to civilian injuries, and police enforcement (White, 2018). The impact of police use of BWCs on community relations, however, is not clear. Many studies have shown that there is no relationship between the police wearing BWCs and the persons perception of the police (Braga, MacDonald and Barao, 2023), the lawfulness of the encounter between the police and the public (Braga, MacDonald, and McCabe, 2022), and there is little research on whether or not the BWC has any impact on the quality of the police-civilian encounter from a customer service perspective. Nonetheless, BWCs provide police managers and supervisors with a window into everyday interactions with the public.

This technology should be leveraged by police departments to assess the quality of these interactions. Good “customer service” and procedurally just interactions should be recognized and celebrated. Policies and processes should be identified where supervisors, or independent reviewers, sample and review BWC recordings of police-civilian encounters and evaluate them on such qualities as:

- Was the officer respectful?

- Did the officer address the problem?
- Did the officer explain how to solve the problem if it could not be handled immediately?
- Did the officer show concern for the person's problem?
- Did the officer listen and provide the person with an opportunity to speak their mind?
- Did the officer respond and handle the incident timely?
- Did the person appear satisfied with the officer and the way the encounter was handled?

These dimensions and others could be assessed by reviewers and used to evaluate individual officer and department-wide performance when it comes to customer service. Police officers do excellent work every day and they are rarely given credit for it. Using BWCs and systematically categorizing interactions with the public will give police departments data to promote the good works officers do, and perhaps identify any problems that are occurring during these day-to-day interactions.

Satisfaction Survey - The use of community satisfaction surveys regarding the police has a long tradition in the U.S. and abroad (Miller and Davis, 2008). The Commission for Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) requires that police departments accredited by them must undergo regular and periodic surveys of the public (CALEA, 2023). These surveys, however, explore attitudes and perceptions about the department in general, which is a good thing, but police departments should also consider understanding the dynamics of individual police-civilian encounters, including “involuntary contacts” such as encounters where civilians are arrested, issued citations, or stopped.

To understand the quality of police-civilian interactions, even ones where the civilian is arrested, cited, or stopped, police departments should explore opportunities to conduct regular and periodic surveys. Using civilian contact data already possessed by departments from arrest reports, tickets, complaint reports, etc., police departments could reach out to these individuals to assess the quality of the interactions they had with their officers. Undoubtedly, developing rigorous sampling methods and validated survey instruments to measure “customer” satisfaction are beyond the skill-set of most police managers. However, those skills do exist in the community and police departments should seek out individuals and groups that would be willing and able to assist them (McCabe, 2010).

Again, the data obtained by these surveys should be used to promote positive police-civilian interaction, which there will be many. Using the data to discipline or sanction officer could have a negative impact and undermine the overall value of this method from a strategic standpoint.

Customer Service Orientation at Department Facilities - Entering a police facility, to report an incident or visit a member of the department, can be an intimidating experience for members of the public not accustomed to them. To say the least, the typical public area of a police facility is generally not public-friendly and might feature various security measures such as bullet-resistant glass, intercoms, and locked doors. Security is important at police facilities and this is not intended to suggest that police departments reduce their security profile to promote community satisfaction, however, there could be measures taken to soften the environment and not blast the message “you are not wanted here” to members of the community that enter.

This element of community engagement, ironically, requires the help of the community. By partnering with local community groups, police departments could collaboratively explore the elements of the police facility that work and create this customer service orientation. The department-community team would be tasked with evaluating the current space and determine what things are needed. They might consider space issues, services needed, public access times/days, technology cost, etc. The goal would be to create a public-access space at the police facility, with the community in mind, driven by community input.

User-Friendly Website - In the current social media age having a user-friendly website is as critical as any other asset a police department uses. The first thing a member of the public will do when they want to learn about their local police department is to search for them on the internet. With this in mind, police department websites should be viewed as tools that help bridge the gap between the department and the community. They can be passive, where content exists for the visitor to explore, or active where visitors can conduct “business” with the department as if they were actually visiting, such as file a report, request permits, etc. or perhaps offer recruiting information for prospective officers

At a minimum, police websites should have the following features:

- Responsive layouts (highlighting the department and its mission and goals)
- User-friendly navigation (adapting to different screen sizes)
- Engaging content (safety tips, updated stories, crime and traffic initiatives)
- Integration of Services (crime maps, incident reporting)
- Accessible (every member of the community)
- Secure (compliant with cybersecurity standards)
- Community Focused (interactive features: events, forum, calendars)

Here again, the community should be involved with the design and development of the site and the site should be periodically tested to ensure all the features are functional and up-to-date. Having a “Message from the Chief” from three chiefs prior is not the public message a department wants to send.

Public Relations - Public relations for the police are the various things done by the department to shape perceptions and influence the attitudes of the public about the police in their community. Most people have little or no contact with their local police so direct interactions have a limited effect on the attitudes of an entire community. Therefore, it is incumbent upon police managers to engage in a robust public relations effort. But why? When assessing the operational performance of a police department in this area you should look for three critical process:

1. Traditional media - if your department is big enough, or you are lucky enough, a professional Public/Press Information Officer (PIO) is critical in this area. A PIO can develop and maintain positive relationships with the traditional mainstream media and act as their point of contact in the department. The PIO can provide a consistent message and manage all external communications. If there is no PIO, the Chief or a high ranking member of the department with good communications skills should act in this capacity. There is no specific way to deal with the traditional media, but the department should consider policies related to whom in the department is authorized to speak to the media, what information will be released and in what form, and who gets access to certain incidents (IACP, 2019)
2. Social Media - social media is a powerful tool and a very quick way of disseminating information. Police departments must be aware that there are many potential uses of social media for both community engagement and investigations. In addition, police

departments must develop policies and procedures for the use of social media by their employees (IACP, 2019). There are three general areas where social media is essential:

1. Outreach and Information - unlike traditional media where the department responds to news stories published by others, social media gives departments the opportunity to “push” messages to the public. Crime prevention tips, seeking tips about unsolved crimes, missing persons, positive police-civilian encounters can be distributed. Social media could also be a two-way tool to promote trust and community building.
 2. Notifications - social media can be used to provide the community with information regarding on-going events, road closures, emergencies, parades, etc. that might impact normal life. Departments can deliver accurate and timely information about ongoing police incidents without having to go through the traditional media and hope they will publicize it.
 3. Recruitment - social media can give departments a tool to attract potential candidates. Content for Instagram, blogs, Twitter, TikTok, etc. can be developed and managed to recruit police officers.
3. Internal Management - Regardless of whether your department has a PIO or the chief is the department spokesperson, it is critical that one individual in the department be responsible for managing these processes. This includes dealing with the traditional media, developing and implementing a robust social media presence, and equally importantly, monitoring the social media of members of the department.

Police employees obviously enjoy the right to freedom of expression and nothing here is intended to inhibit that freedom. However, police officers have an important role in our society and their use of social media can reflect badly on their department if they make racist or controversial posts. Officers also need to be mindful of divulging law enforcement sensitive information or make posts that contradict the policies of their departments. Therefore, it is critical that departments develop policies that regulate official and personal use of social media.

D. External - Stakeholders

The last part of this section deals with what would typically be referred to as Police-Community Relations. This is the process of engaging with stakeholders that are external to the police department. The reality is that there is not just one external community stakeholder that the police need to engage. If it were only that simple. The U.S. is a diverse country and the individual cities and towns often reflect this diversity. There are numerous countries of origin, languages, religions, customs, social classes, political views, etc. that police departments need to engage and provide service. The first step in developing an external stakeholder community engagement strategy is to collect data on those many communities.

Community Data - In order to understand the community, police departments must collect and manage information about the various communities they serve. Below is a list of items that should be tracked regularly.

- Demographics (age, race, gender, income, occupations, etc.)
- Community Groups (Leaders, Members, Meetings, Special Events)
- Elected Officials (federal, state, local, community-based)

Armed with a census of the various groups and group leaders, police departments can then begin to develop a comprehensive strategy to engage these groups, make them advocates of public safety for their constituents. No two police departments are the same, and no two communities are the same. They consist of different people and preferences. However, below are some elements that should be considered when developing a comprehensive community engagement strategy involving external stakeholders.

Citizens Police Academy (CPA) - This is a program designed to educate residents and local citizens on the various aspects of law enforcement. It is for those interested in learning more about how the departments operate. The idea started in the U.K. and was first implemented in Orlando, FL in 1985. Typically, the goals of the Citizens Police Academy is to expose community members to police training, the environments of police work, and to open up lines of communication with the community. The NYPD for example, designed a 6-week community training program that provides members of the community with a background and deeper understanding of NYPD policies and activities, as well as the structure and limit of police power. Programs can be tailored to fit the needs of the

department and community. There is no one size that fits all. However, CPA programs require a substantial amount of time from the participants and reach only a small segment of the community (PERF, 2000; NYPD, 2024).

People’s Police Academy - An interesting twist on the Citizens Police Academy concept is the People’s Police Academy. This program developed by Reverend Que English in the Bronx, NY is designed to orient newly assigned police officers to the various cultures, values, residents, and stakeholders in the community they are serving. It was designed to create a platform that brings all members of the community together to co-create public safety, build trust and cohesion and commit to better understand the role that each of us plays in supporting safe, healthy communities (cf. Medgar Evers College, 2024, <https://www.mec.cuny.edu/centers/dubois-bunche-center-for-public-policy/peoples-police-academy/>)

Community Ambassadors - These individuals are representatives of the community and the police department that are tasked with keeping each other up-to-date about incidents and events important to one another. As the term implies, the ambassador is a representative or promoter of a particular constituency. For an effective community engagement strategy, police departments should consider identifying “ambassadors” both inside and outside the department.

Community Notification Protocol - It should be department policy to keep community leaders and organizations informed of local conditions, activities, and events of mutual concern to the communities. Departments should take responsibility for notifying community leaders directly and personally (not through general social media outreach) about unusual events, newsworthy, or sensitive incidents that have the potential for concern or unrest, and about the intended police response to these incidents. Community leaders should include, but not limited to, local elected officials, community board chairpersons, community council members, civic, religious, educational, business, and tenant leaders, also representatives from any notable governmental agencies operating within the confines of the precinct. A current list of these key community members should be maintained and used to inform local community members about incidents as they unfold.

Department Liaisons - This is the “ambassador” concept, but in the opposite direction. In

this approach, every identified community stakeholder should be aligned with a specific member of the department that they can contact for assistance. Department representatives should be at a sufficiently high level in the department where they will be accessible readily, and able to provide an organizational response. For example, a local high school principal might be assigned to the day-shift lieutenant. Any questions or concerns about the department or its operations could be specifically directed to this lieutenant. If the lieutenant did not know or was not responsible for the area being inquired about, it would be their job to find the information and communicate it back to the principal. In addition, it would be incumbent upon this lieutenant to regularly interact with the principal to ensure the policing needs of that school were met. Perhaps this would involve supervision of the School Resources Officers, a sporting event needing security, safety lectures, or whatever the school needs. The liaison would be the first point of contact and they would be responsible for maintaining an open line of communication.

Police Clergy Council - Local clergy leaders are respected and trusted leaders in the community. Police departments should leverage faith leaders to ensure police services are being delivered to the community. The Houston, TX police department, for example, has a robust program involving local clergy, called the “Police and Clergy Alliance (PACA).” PACA, allows local clergy volunteers, in partnership with the HPD, to provide valuable services and resources in areas such as responding to call-out situations where they can offer support to HPD employees, victims and their families, participate in ride-alongs to personally experience what police officers are faced with on a daily basis, go into apartment complexes and schools to mentor at-risk students or those who need additional guidance in their lives, assist with disaster relief efforts, and other significant incidents.

Police departments should look to the model created by the HPD to develop relationships with the local clergy and create an entity that can work alongside the police to accomplish their goals.

Community Sentiment Meter - This is similar to the “customer” satisfaction surveys discussed earlier, except this approach involves survey of the same people or community leaders. Instead of a cross-sectional assessment of services, this sentiment meter would provide an on-going longitudinal assessment of community stakeholder satisfaction. Each month community leaders, and persons from identified community stakeholder groups could

be surveyed using a short questionnaire to determine satisfaction level. The results would be useful to a department keeping a pulse on community satisfaction and a gauge to evaluate policies and programs being implemented in the community.

Community-Based Initiatives - The community-based initiatives (CBI) represent the various programs that departments have implemented to engage their communities. There is no empirical research that shows the effectiveness of one program or another. However, they are presented here as a catalogue of sorts detailing the various CBIs that have been facilitated by local police departments (Moore, 2023). They should be considered as part of an overall community engagement strategy, but not necessarily the only components of that strategy

- Coffee with a Cop
- Shop with a Cop
- Prescription Drug Takeback
- Positive “Tickets” redeemable for discounts at local retail shops
- Coat Drive
- MADD
- SADD
- Holiday Safety (Halloween, Christmas, etc.)
- Youth Sports (Police Athletic League)
- Food Drives
- Police Chief for a Day contest
- Community Safety Training (Active Shooter Awareness)
- Senior Citizen Outreach

All of the above are popular programs in local police departments and should be considered by others as part of an overall engagement strategy.

Conclusion

Community engagement is essential to the successful operations of a police department.

Crime reduction, traffic safety, and disorder control must be approached with an active and engaged commitment of the community. This paper conceptualizes communities across two main dimensions: internal and external and views these communities from two different perspectives: transactional and stakeholder. To understand a departments operational performance in this area it must be evaluated across these dimensions/perspective. Department leadership should be held accountable for developing a plan to improve community satisfaction with the department and develop programs and policies that reach community members in each of the four community types. Success in this area is as important, if not more important, than effective crime reduction, patrol operations or investigations. It is the essence of what the police do and should be embraced by all members of the police department.

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Endnotes

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