



Creating a Culture of Equitable Policing

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Throughout the history of the United States, police were responsible for enforcing various laws. Most laws were righteous and were enacted in the spirit of helping citizens. Unfortunately, some laws were either created unfairly or were categorically oppressive. Sadly, marginalized populations, such as African Americans, were on the receiving end of those laws. Our nation's difficulty in reconciling oppressive transgressions resulted in deep divides between marginalized populations and the men and women who enforce the law. Recently, the divide was further exacerbated by the death of George Floyd at the hands of several officers from the Minneapolis Police Department. This act, and other recent deaths at the hands of police, have led some people to call for sweeping police reforms ranging from delivery of basic services to outright abolishment of police organizations.

Now more than ever, it is important for mayors, alderpersons, managers, administrators, and police chiefs to work toward creating a culture of equitable policing in organizations. This article will help provide a basic roadmap to generate a culture of equitable policing in your community.

Creating Equity through Policy

The first step toward creating equity in policing is to work with your police chief to create policies that reflect community values. The best and most basic paradigm to promote a culture of equitable policing is the procedural justice model. There are four basic principles of procedural justice:

1. Treat people with dignity and respect.
2. Give everyone a voice during encounters.
3. Be neutral and transparent in decision making.
4. Convey trustworthy motives.

These principles must be embedded within policy to establish the foundation of equitable policing. Procedural justice must be taught upon hire, during initial training, and reinforced throughout the officers' careers.

To assist public officials and police chiefs in establishing procedural justice policies and procedures, several organizations

have published exceptional resources. *The Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* provides a broad overview of policing strategies to achieve procedural justice. The Police Executive Research Forum's (PERF) *Guiding Principles on Use of Force* also provides an excellent framework to develop use of force policies and training considerations for de-escalation tactics.

For comprehensive policy building, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) have published recommended policies on a wide breadth of topics. The Wisconsin Law Enforcement Accreditation Group and Lexipol LLC are also excellent resources for developing policies.

Strategies for Equitable Policing

Since you've established policies that promote procedural justice, now your focus must be directed toward working with your police chiefs to develop strategies that encourage equitable policing. The three core stratagems to concentrate on are: community-oriented policing, problem-oriented policing, and evidence-based practices.

Community-Oriented Policing Strategy

The idea of community-oriented policing has been around for several decades. Unfortunately, people often confuse community policing with community relations. Community relations is built around promoting an image the community may desire. True community policing is a crime reduction strategy that requires partnerships with the community. Dr. Robert Friedman defined community policing as "a policy and a strategy aimed at achieving more effective and efficient crime control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, improved police service and police legitimacy, through a proactive reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime-causing conditions. It assumes a need for greater accountability of police, greater public share in decision-making, and greater concern for civil rights and liberties" (Friedman, 1992).

Elected officials and police chiefs need to implement community policing strategies that bring the public

together with the officers to identify problems causing crime and social disorder. Through this collaborative partnership trust will be developed and foster a greater understanding of acceptable policing practices. Some examples of award-winning community policing strategies that created positive outcomes can be found on the IACP website, www.theiacp.org/community-policing-award. The community policing committee of the IACP may also be contacted at committees@theiacp.org to help provide direction on viable community policing strategies.

Another exceptional resource for community policing is the U.S. Dept. of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (www.cops.usdoj.gov). The COPS office provides free publications that offer step-by-step strategies that can reduce crime, build trust, and improve emotional resilience. They can also provide technical assistance to departments and grant funding to launch various programs.

Problem-Oriented Policing Strategy

In addition to community policing strategies, departments should implement problem-oriented policing (POP)

methods to reduce crime. POP "is an analytic method used by police to develop strategies that prevent and reduce crime" (crimesolutions.gov, 2020). POP strategies require the study of the underlying causes of crime and disorder. Once the cause of the problem is determined, police will utilize various methods to minimize or abate the criminal activity.

The most prominent resource for problem-oriented policing is the Center for Problem Oriented Policing (POP) located at Arizona State University. Their website, www.popcenter.asu.edu, contains a wealth of information on various POP program topics ranging from animal-related issues to violence. The topics are easy to locate, and the solutions are provided to the user at no cost.

POP often focuses on approaches that include education, environmental security, and partnerships focused on problem solving. Police departments that utilize POP strategies will learn they can improve the quality of life in their communities and develop productive collaborative relationships with the citizens they serve. The culmination of this is the creation of relationships built on mutual trust and respect.

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<https://www.uwsp.edu/conted/Pages/Wisconsin-Alcohol-Policy-Seminar.aspx>



Evidence-Based Practices

Both community and problem oriented policing strategies work toward ensuring procedural justice and establishing an equitable policing culture. The final component needed to achieve positive police/community outcomes is the implementation of evidence-based practices.

Evidence-based practices (EBP) is defined by the National Institute of Corrections as “the objective, balanced, and responsible use of current research and the best available data to guide policy and practice decisions, such that outcomes for consumers are improved” (National Institute of Corrections, 2020).

The past several decades brought about policing strategies that were effective at reducing crime. Some of those strategies include *broken windows* and *zero-tolerance policing*. However, these strategies had detrimental consequences. They consequently led to over-policing and mass incarceration in marginalized communities. By using EBP practices departments can maximize equitable outcomes while minimizing potential harm to the populace.

Public officials and police chiefs should take great care to implement programs that are evidence based and don't intentionally or unintentionally target marginalized populations. Both CrimeSolutions.Gov (www.crimesolutions.gov) and the PEW Results First Clearinghouse Database (www.pewtrusts.org) provide access to various programs and rate the level of evidence that supports the programs' efficacy.

Considerations

As communities consider various police reform strategies it is hard to ignore the calls for defunding the police and reallocating resources elsewhere (social services, etc.). Social service professionals are excellent at providing services to persons with mental and substance use disorders, homelessness, and other welfare type issues. However, it is difficult at best to exclude law enforcement from assisting in those circumstances. Police become involved in social service type incidents due to statutory requirements or because the afflicted persons were involved in the commission of a crime.

Communities should look at investing resources in social service programs, but not at the expense or exclusion of law enforcement services. Excluding law enforcement from having the opportunity to positively impact persons in need will only further the prevention of building trusting relationships. Communities with police departments that have actively

partnered with social services and counselors have experienced great success. Their success can be measured in greater satisfaction, reduced crime, reduced overdoses/addiction, etc.

Fortunately, some great organizations were established to help communities and their police work collaboratively to ensure equitable outcomes. These organizations include but are not limited to the Police Treatment and Community Collaborative (www.ptacollaborative.org), Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (www.paariusa.org), Crisis Intervention Teams International (www.citinternational.org), Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (www.tasc.org), and the Center for Policing Equity (www.policingequity.org).

All these organizations are built upon the procedural justice paradigm and focus on the strategies identified in this article. The solutions to reform and develop an equitable policing culture are out there. Now is the time to involve our communities, elected officials, and police in a collaborative approach that benefits everyone.

About the Author:

Eric Atkinson is the police chief for the City of Menomonie. He has served on both local and international committees to help develop best practices for community policing and evidence-based initiatives. Chief Atkinson has also served as a lecturer for both UW-River Falls and UW-Stout. Chief Atkinson has also presented at local and national conferences, including the League's Chief Executives Workshop, to promote community policing and leading organizational change. Contact Eric at atkinsone@menomonie-wi.gov

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