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POSSIBILITIES FOR POLICE-COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

A Public Engagement Research Report

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ABOUT PUBLIC AGENDA

Public Agenda is a nonprofit organization dedicated to nonpartisan public policy research. Founded in 1975 by former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Daniel Yankelovich, the social scientist and author, Public Agenda is well respected for its influential public opinion polls and balanced citizen education materials. Its mission is to inform leaders about the public's views and to educate citizens about government policy.

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

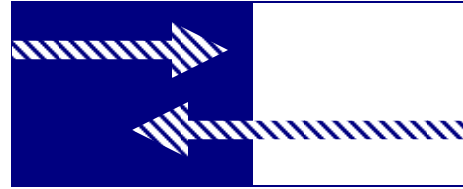
This project explores possibilities for dialogue between average citizens and police officers. We wanted to find out whether an honest and productive exchange of views among such participants was possible or whether it would inevitably degenerate into aggressive and defensive posturing. If it was possible, what kinds of discussions would develop, and toward what practical ends could they be applied? Could dialogue among community members and police increase public safety, promote healthier neighborhoods or alleviate tensions between the police and residents?

By dialogue, we mean something very different from the usual yammer of gripe-filled public hearings, empty political rhetoric, contentious talk radio, pronouncements by pundits and the myriad other spectacle that substitute for true deliberation in today's public square. We mean instead an honest exchange of views on important public issues, with people from varied perspectives, under conditions where power dynamics, political posturing and defensiveness are minimized to the greatest extent possible.

We believe that forging connections through dialogue not only affects the individuals involved in the discussions, but can ripple through the larger community. Where police-community relations are positive, the police can fight crime more effectively; where crime is under control, struggling communities become better able to organize themselves and promote their own well-being; where communities are self-organizing, there is less criminal behavior in the first place.

Dialogue and Community Policing

Much of the work we describe in this report makes sense in the context of "community policing," which has become an important crime control strategy for many police departments across the



If you want to know what's wrong with our community, you have to be able to talk to the community, not at the community, the same way the community needs to talk to the police.

New Haven resident

You need to have them sit down—not just your community leaders or your community cops, but have all your cops involved in community meetings. Let them hear exactly what the people are saying. Let me hear it.

New York City police officer

It's one thing to talk. It's another thing to really hear from their point of view, to really see from their side.

New York City resident



country. Practically speaking, this means initiatives such as more neighborhood-based officers walking the beat (or riding it on bicycle), sanctioned citizen-watch organizations, partnerships with community leaders and organizations and a greater emphasis on community problem solving and crime prevention than is seen in traditional police work.¹

The nature of community policing is such that one would expect direct dialogue between community members and the police to be a major component. Although we have run across a few scattered examples where dialogue on the grassroots level has supplemented community-policing programs, the idea of dialogue as a tool for community policing appears to be rather rare.

Dialogue and Police-Community Relations

Given most officials' experiences with public hearings and town hall meetings, this is not surprising. Community forums with the general public are typically unproductive, unpleasant affairs; more gripe sessions than true problem-solving opportunities. In this project, one of our chief aims was to experiment with ways of organizing such dialogues that would avoid these problems and lead to a constructive exchange of views that can actually help reduce crime and promote public safety.

Sometimes the problem goes deeper than poorly designed public forums. The relationship between the police and the community itself can be burdened by difficulties, with racial dynamics often a major component. In addition to crime prevention, minimizing such tensions in the police-community relationship is a major rationale for experimenting with police-community dialogue.²

Overview and Table of Contents

This report reflects fieldwork in New Haven, Connecticut; San Antonio, Texas; and New York City. In each site we conducted individual interviews, focus groups and pilot dialogue sessions with police officers and residents. (For more detail on methodology, see Appendix 1.)

As with all qualitative research, these findings should be viewed as strong hypotheses rather than definitive conclusions. That said, we believe the project's results make a compelling case that police-community dialogue is well worth pursuing.

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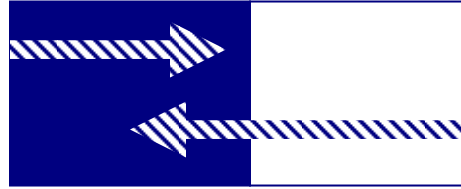
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I. Residents Strongly Favor Direct Contact and Dialogue with the Police



We met with groups of “regular” people in San Antonio, New Haven and New York City to get their read on crime and relations with the police. Strong majorities wanted more contact and dialogue with the police, even in neighborhoods where the relationship was strained.

How many times have you had a chance just to sit down and talk to a policeman? I've very seldom had that chance.

San Antonio resident

People wanted to talk and work with the police to reduce crime in their neighborhoods, improve the prospects for their kids and, in some instances, alleviate tensions that diminish the quality of life in their communities.

If you really want it to work well, [the police] have to get to know the people, especially the young people. The young people need to get to know them, not just as policemen, but as individuals.

New Haven resident (African American, male)

If the cop on the beat would make four contacts a shift, and spend three minutes with each one of those contacts, over a period of time there would be a ripple effect throughout the community.

San Antonio resident (white, male)

If the community looks at [a police officer] and says, “I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him,” you might as well work sanitation because you're not going to do any good.

New York City resident (white, female)

Finding the Human Face: Beyond Stereotypes

People wanted to get to know the police as real people, to move beyond stereotypes, and hoped the police would want to do the same.

Years ago there were a couple of cops that used to walk around and you got to know their faces. They got to know our faces. You knew who they were.

New York City resident (white, male)

Most policemen look at stereotypes. They look at the color of our skin in our community. They don't look at us as individuals. They don't look at us as hardworking people: mothers, dads, sons, daughters. There are issues that are never addressed at block watches—that's not really the police getting involved.

New Haven resident (African American, male)



Even before we got everyone in the same room together, community members thought dialogue with police officers would lead to lively discussion that would result in greater understanding and mutual respect.

I think if the police had been present, there would have been a lot more colorful dialogue....We just were kind of bouncing it off each other. You bounce it off [them], then the real topics come out.

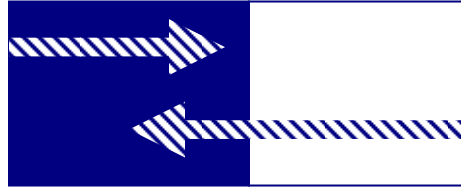
San Antonio resident (white, male)

If a policeman is sitting across from me, then we are going to know what each other's life is like. [Then] I know when he puts on that uniform he has to play the role he is in. You have to have respect for him and [remember] that he is a human being underneath, and vice versa.

New Haven resident (white, female)

II. Police Are Ambivalent About Increased Community Involvement

The patrol officers we interviewed were more divided in their views on increased contact with the community. Although some were clearly comfortable with and supportive of community-oriented policing, others had mixed feelings, and still others did not think much of it at all.



Everybody has different opinions about community policing. It's hard to say.

New York City police officer

For those in the first category, community policing just seemed to fit like a glove. It made sense to them, first of all, as a law enforcement strategy.

Without community support, what's the police force other than an occupying force?

San Antonio police officer (white, male)

You have to be in touch with the community or you don't have anything; you will be battling all the time.

New Haven police officer (white, male)

I depend on the community. They can tell me about what's going on in the street.

New York City police officer (Latino, male)

Community policing, I do that with all my people in my square. They've all got my cell phone—and the city doesn't pay for my cell phone. They call me, they say, "Hey, this person's doing this."

San Antonio police officer (Latino, male)

They don't have to know you personally, but you've got to be kind of out there where they see you, they see you are doing your job.... Then if tension develops, you can calm down situations because...they know you're going to handle it the proper way.

New Haven police officer (African American, male)

These officers also spoke of close, positive police-community relations as a way to improve the quality of life for residents and for themselves.



They want cops to talk to them. You don't want a cop to come up to you and treat you like a perpetrator. You come up to ask them something, you don't want to have tension already built up. People in the community want to feel that the cops are their friends again.

New York City police officer (Latino, male)

Once you get to know people, they open up. You help them out. They feel a little more comfortable.

New York City police officer (white, male)

If you care about your cops...not getting into volatile situations, then you need to have your cops a little bit more involved with the community.

New York City police officer (Latino, male)

Other police officers were less enthusiastic about community interaction. It's worth doing, they seemed to be saying, but not at the expense of more important areas of police work. Still other officers viewed it as a waste of time—or, worse, as dangerous.

Is there a need for [community policing] as far as crime reduction? Probably not. It's more of a touchy-feely kind of thing.

San Antonio police officer (white, male)

Sometimes...people [from the community] just want to gripe.

New York City police officer (Latino, female)

If you're gonna put me in a neighborhood that I will probably get shot at every time I got out of my car, I don't want the community policing, that's not going to work for me.

New Haven police officer (white, male)

While these varied views often seemed to reflect each officer's differing analysis of what police work is all about, it also became clear in the interviews that community policing is simply a better fit for some personalities than others. Some officers suggested that a generational dynamic might be at work, with younger officers being more likely to be open to a community orientation and older cops more likely to be resistant.

Me, I like the concept of community policing. It's one of the reasons why I got into it... But some of the old-timers, no, they didn't like community policing. All that helping out, soup-kitchen stuff, it's like, "That's not what I'm there for."

New Haven police officer (African American, male)

But even if some of the police officers were more ambivalent about community-policing ideas than most of the residents, most police agreed there is *something* to it. The majority of officers we



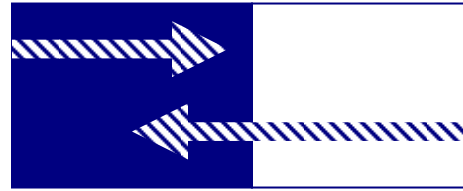
interviewed said more mutual understanding between the police and the community would pay off, particularly in controlling crime.

You need [the community] for almost anything, any program. You have to build up a trusting relationship with them.

New York City police officer (white, male)

III. Obstacles to Police-Community Cooperation

The ambivalence about community involvement described in the last section obviously constitutes an obstacle to police-community cooperation, one that departments dedicated to community-oriented policing attempt to overcome in various ways. They recruit personnel likely to be comfortable with community involvement, provide appropriate training, and offer incentives and career paths that encourage it.



I feel a very “us against them” thing.

New York City resident

This section describes other obstacles suggested by our research that deserve attention as well. The sections that follow go on to demonstrate how dialogue can help dissolve these obstacles.

Mutual Mistrust

Mistrust and cynicism are obstacles to better relations between citizens and professionals of all kinds, and the police are no exceptions. We saw this dynamic more strongly in some of the three sites than in others and also more strongly among some groups than others. In San Antonio, for instance, citizens seemed to be generally trusting of the police and willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. Among New Yorkers generally, and among African American residents of New Haven specifically, it was not unusual to encounter a more cynical response.

I don't trust the police. The last person I would look for if I was in trouble was a policeman.

New York City resident (Latino, female)

Okay, we have a meeting and talk to [the police]. Then, when they go back out, they still just sit in their nice cars.

New Haven resident (African American, female)

Police officers have their own versions of mistrust that they can bring to the relationship—a sort of occupational hazard that comes with dealing with criminals more often and more intensively than with law-abiding citizens.

The minute a person approaches a cop, the cop is right on alert, like, Okay, something is going to happen. It's not always like that.

New York City police officer (Latino, male)



[In general] community policing is good. But if I'm walking [in certain neighborhoods], the people there, they definitely don't want us there. They're not going to say anything to us.

New Haven police officer (Latino, male)

Perhaps the main implication here is a cautionary one. It seems likely that any initiative to bring citizens and police together could backfire and feed the natural tendency toward cynicism and mistrust if it became seen as an empty political gesture rather than a sincere attempt to build mutual understanding and address real problems.

Racial Tension

The amount and type of racial tension differed markedly across the three cities where we did our fieldwork. Racial tensions were least apparent in San Antonio, which some people attributed to the attitudes engendered by the many military personnel stationed nearby, in addition to the fact that Latino residents have long been in the majority. Racial tensions with the police were more apparent in New Haven and New York City.

We have had [a] meeting for parents. I looked at one officer...who was a white cop. It was like he just couldn't wait to get out there and say, "I'm going to check this one out, I'm going to check that one." I'm surprised he didn't check us as we were coming in. I could see no sincerity.

New Haven resident (African American, male)

I called the police recently because I saw five white guys beating up a black guy. The police went after the black guy instead of going to the white guys who were beating him up. I'm trying to explain to the police, they didn't want to hear anything....They assume that the kid, because he was black, was doing something wrong.

New York City resident (Latino, female)

Some police officers—generally minorities themselves—agreed that racial tensions can be a significant hurdle to improved relations with the community.

If you're dealing with prejudice or racism [yourself] within your own department, it's hard to say, "Okay, you know what, let me tell everybody out in the community it's okay" [meaning racism isn't an issue]. You're dealing with the crap yourself.

New York City police officer (Latino, male)

A black police officer, originally from inner-city New Haven, agreed that some white officers have trouble understanding and relating to the city's black residents and that this can lead to unnecessary tensions. He explained how different officers might react to kids hanging out on the corner in an inner-city neighborhood.



Most of the time it's nothing—if you were raised up in that community or in a community like that, most of the time [you know] they aren't doing anything.... But someone who's not from there, they're just going, "I don't want to see you."

New Haven police officer (African American)

Other officers—generally white officers—thought people too often see things like racial profiling where it doesn't exist. They seemed not only frustrated, but perplexed at the tendency of citizens to interpret police work in racial terms.

The funny thing that I always get is when you pull somebody over...they'll always say it's a profiling thing. What am I supposed to do, the community is Hispanic! How is it profiling? Am I supposed to wait for that one Chinese guy that drives through the neighborhood once a week and then stop him?

New York City police officer (white, male)

Unrealistic Expectations

From a police perspective, citizens' expectations can sometimes be unrealistic and inappropriate. As one officer put it, sometimes the community thinks the police are "supposed to be nice" even when the situation calls for him or her to be all business. As he explained:

When I come to a scene, especially if my partner's gotten there first, my job is not initially to make friends with everyone. My job is to cover my buddy who's handling the call....I think the citizen, when they see me come to the scene, would like me to say, "Hello, how are you doing?" and shake their hands.

San Antonio police officer (white, gender)

Another example: People want immediate action and don't always understand the rules and regulations the police must contend with.

The way the laws are structured here in New York City, just the fact that you're telling me there's a guy selling drugs on the street [isn't enough]. I can't go over there and start searching the guy.

New York City police officer (white, male)

The give-and-take of dialogue can help people understand that things can be more complicated than they appear, as we witnessed in a discussion with residents of the Crown Heights section of New York City. One woman complained that police just need to "stand at the bus stop for five minutes [to see who is dealing drugs]." In response, a man reminded her, "We don't know,



through their eyes, what [the police] are dealing with when they're dealing with 25 calls in a night. You think it's so easy because you're sitting at the window or at the bus stop."

The Media Can Make Things Worse

Some community members and police officers brought up news coverage as a hindrance to police-community cooperation, saying reporters sensationalize news, encourage stereotypes and gloss over police infractions.

The media take this city and drag it through the mud on a regular basis. They never portray the good things that we do.

New Haven police officer (Latino, gender)

The media has a lot to do with the stereotypes that black folks face today. Because if you look on the evening news...who do you see? The media tends to show us in the negative in most of the situations that I have experienced.

New Haven resident (African American, male)

Practical Obstacles

Meeting? What Meeting?

Even good intentions sometimes aren't enough. For example, despite department efforts in all three cities to inform citizens of their community-policing initiatives such as monthly precinct meetings, many of the residents were unfamiliar with or at best only vaguely aware of them.

Talking to the Police Can Be Bad for Your Health

Residents of crime-heavy neighborhoods pointed out that there are dangers inherent in attending meetings with the police or talking to them on the street. They explained how some drug dealers or other criminals watch police stations regularly to see who comes and goes. Police agreed that residents' fear of retribution for talking to police can make increased cooperation difficult.

Inadequate Staffing

The biggest practical hurdle to police-community relations in San Antonio, noted by police officers and residents alike, is inadequate police staffing. Tight budgets have cut the number of community-policing officers as well as patrol officers throughout the city, resulting in slower response time when residents call 911. Slow response time, in turn, leads to less community cooperation. As one resident put it, "People aren't going to call if no one's ever going to show up."

Uneven Sense of “Community”

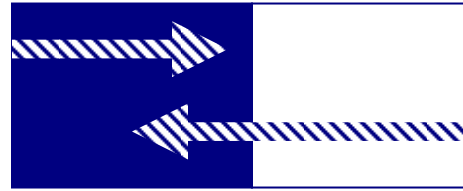
Generally, we found that New Yorkers with the strongest ties to their neighborhoods—who were a little older, had families and had been living in the same place for a while—tended to be interested in and attracted to developing closer ties to the police. By contrast, younger and more mobile New Yorkers did not often relate to the concept and just weren’t as invested in the long-term health of their neighborhoods.

Language Barriers

As illustrated in Section V—which describes a dialogue between police officers and Latino immigrant residents in New York City—language barriers can also be a significant obstacle to police-community relations.

IV. Working Through the Obstacles: Dialogue Design and Results

During the course of this project we conducted five small, moderated dialogues with police officers and a diverse array of “regular” citizens. In New Haven, we held two such sessions in focus group facilities. In San Antonio, one dialogue took place in a focus group facility and another in a police substation. And in New York City, a dialogue was conducted in a Queens high school with police officers and Latino immigrants.



If we have interactions with the police like this, maybe we could make a big improvement.

San Antonio resident

This section draws on the four police-community dialogues that were held in San Antonio and New Haven to make a number of general points about the nature of police-community dialogue. The next section provides a more in-depth look at the process through an examination of the New York City dialogue.

Dialogue Design

The dialogue design we applied was adapted from principles and strategies Public Agenda has developed and employed in countless initiatives over its 30-year history. These include the following:

- Establishing local, nonpartisan sponsors/organizers
- Including a diverse cross section of participants “beyond the usual suspects”
- Holding dialogue in small, diverse groups
- Structuring dialogue with nonpartisan discussion materials that help citizens weigh alternatives (“Choicework”)
- Facilitating the dialogue with trained, nonpartisan moderators
- Documenting such results as areas of common ground, areas of disagreement, unanswered questions and concerns and priorities for future action and collaboration
- Following up dialogue with various kinds of actions

Each dialogue brought together several police officers and anywhere from 8 to 30 members of the general public. In each session, we tackled one of four topics: “Improving Police-Community Relations,” “Preventing Crime, Promoting Public Safety,” “Ensuring School Safety” and “Preventing Terrorism and Protecting Civil Rights.” For each of these four topics, we developed a

“Choicework” discussion guide (reproduced in Appendix 2 and available in booklet form from Public Agenda). These guides introduced the issue at hand and offered several possible approaches to addressing it, providing a structure and framework for getting the conversation going. Public Agenda staff moderated the discussions.

A Civil, Honest, Energetic Exchange of Views

Residents and police officers alike began these sessions tentatively, as if they were getting their bearings—clearly, neither the residents nor the officers were accustomed to sitting down and discussing things together for two hours at a time. As some officers explained, outside of the occasional highly structured public meeting, on-duty police officers rarely interact with anyone who is not a criminal, victim, activist-critic or strong supporter of the police department. They rarely, if ever, have opportunities to engage in conversation with “the mass of citizens out there,” as one put it, as they were able to do in these sessions.

But very soon they warmed up and were exchanging views in response to the discussion materials provided and to one another’s comments. Notably, the dialogues did not veer toward gripe sessions and defensiveness. Instead, they were decidedly civil in tone—yet people still managed to make their needs and criticisms known. To be sure, residents and police officers were probably not quite as direct in their criticisms of each other as would have been the case had the two groups met separately, but they were honest and straightforward enough to keep things grounded in reality—while maintaining enough civility to allow the conversation to evolve.

Overall, these were high-energy affairs. No moderator can recall any of the participants looking bored or disengaged, and laughter was frequent. After several of the dialogues were finished, participants stayed and continued talking, and residents and officers exchanged contact information.

Mutual Understanding

As noted earlier, people thought including police officers in their discussions about crime, public safety and policing in their communities would lead to greater mutual respect and understanding. And, in fact, the actual dialogues bore this out.

Having [the police] in the room gives the advantage of having mutual respect for each other. If a policeman is sitting across from me, then we are going to just know what each other's life is like.

New Haven resident (African American, female)

In one of the San Antonio dialogues, an exchange about car stops between a young Latino woman and a police officer resulted in new insights and understandings for the entire group:

I've been pulled over in little towns. In seeing it in your [a policeman's] eyes, you're watching out for your community, the community that you work for. That was something that was enlightening to me, because I didn't think of it that way. I just thought they were just picking on me.

San Antonio resident (Latino, female)

A lot of times, you don't think about explaining yourself. The thing that I learned [today] is that 15 to 20 seconds to explain yourself, "This is why I am doing it..." That's one thing I can say that I learned from here, that I'll always force myself to remember: You need to explain yourself when you do something.

San Antonio police officer (white, male)

This sounds simple—that 15-second explanation—but it's something not always done that can make a difference for citizens and community relations. We later learned that the San Antonio Police Department stresses giving just such a 15-second explanation. The back-and-forth of the dialogue drove this point home for that police officer in a very personal and direct way, because he was able to see how his explanations affected others.

Mutual Responsibility

As the conversations progressed, residents and police officers talked more about mutual responsibility rather than focusing just on the things each wanted from the other. This is characteristic of real dialogue. Far from the finger-pointing that so often passes for public debate today, these dialogues tended to lead to discussion of mutual accountability. Sometimes residents spoke of how they needed to organize to work effectively, and as equal partners, with the police.

No matter what the standard of living may be, as taxpayers we have a lot of power, a lot of control. But if we don't stand together and unite and tell these people what we expect, we won't get it.... I'm not saying [the police] have to change all their policies, but we, as a community, we are willing to work with you guys--and we need you to work with us.

New Haven resident (African American, male)

And sometimes they spoke simply about how they had to work together to improve their neighborhoods.



We must be involved in our own lives and our own communities if we really want change.

New Haven resident (African American, male)

The police seemed relieved by this line of discussion, because it raised issues of preventing crime in the first place and of allowing the police to focus on the most serious kinds of criminal activity. In one of the San Antonio dialogues, an officer complained about being called by parents to help them discipline their five-year-old, wondering why they and their neighbors couldn't address those kinds of problems themselves and leave him to deal with serious crime fighting. And a New Haven police officer challenged the community members in the group to organize themselves to improve their neighborhood.

Everyone said that they are scared to go out in their community, but my question is, is anyone doing anything about that, except call the cops, like get your neighbors together, and try to also focus on your neighborhood? The police can only do so much, and we need the help.

New Haven police officer (African American, male)

Informing Police Policy and Promoting Community Action

The dialogue sessions with residents and police officers demonstrated that under favorable conditions, meaningful dialogue between police professionals and ordinary citizens can occur. The results have the potential to inform policy, improve communication, create mutual respect and responsibility, and promote public safety. As the next section shows, language barriers, while a challenge, need not stand in the way of achieving these results.

Notably, even these modest experiments in police-community dialogue resulted in ideas for moving forward, including:

- Creating neighborhood-based youth peer courts to resolve small-scale problems before they require police intervention
- Working to improve funding for the police department to improve response time to citizen calls
- Translating more informational materials into Spanish and distributing them in new ways
- Having a community leader speak to officers during roll call to sensitize officers to community concerns and cultural differences
- Organizing events like "National Night Out" as community-building exercises and opportunities for police officers and residents to interact outside of crime situations

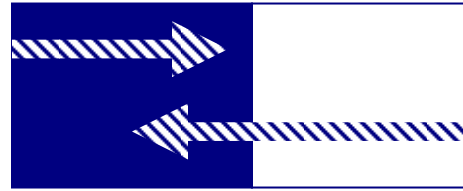
V. Police-Community Dialogue in Action: A New York City Test Case

Public Agenda moderated a two-hour dialogue between members of the Latino immigrant community and members of the New York Police Department in Jackson Heights, Queens. Working through the auspices of the Vera Institute of Justice and the Latin American Integration Center, we helped to facilitate this pilot session to further test the possibilities for productive police-community dialogue.

Latino immigrants are a large, growing and critical part of the fabric of New York life with unique and pressing challenges in their relations with the police—from communicating across language barriers to questions of immigration status to post-9/11 profiling. While Vera had previously been working on programs to improve the relationship between the police and New York City’s Arab, African and Latino immigrant communities, their meetings had so far been between police officers and community *leaders*. Our initiative, which focused on bringing *regular citizens* to the table, would provide an interesting addition and contrast.

The Latin American Integration Center, a community-based organization that assists and seeks to empower the Latino immigrant population throughout the five boroughs, and which had been working with Vera’s initiative, agreed to host the session and recruit local residents to attend the meeting. Participants included about 30 immigrants from Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and the Dominican Republic. The Vera Institute further assisted the effort by helping to secure the participation of five police officers—four from the NYPD Community Affairs Division and one from a local Queens precinct.

Public Agenda provided the discussion framework—“Improving Police-Community Relations”—and the moderators. The discussion described the following three approaches, each with its own set of pros and cons:



The Latin community wants to leave here convinced that the good intentions of the police and us advance us toward something; that in the next meeting, we have progressed, even if it’s just a bit.

New York City resident

We will do our best to get out to the community information in Spanish about the programs and services available to them, as well as their rights and responsibilities when interacting with the police—it’s a two-way street.

New York City police officer

1. Improve police accountability
2. Increase mutual understanding
3. Communities should take more responsibility for themselves

To overcome the language barrier, the Choicework guide was presented in both English and Spanish versions. Additionally, a Spanish-speaking moderator co-facilitated the session, and two translators ensured that everyone understood every statement made.

This pilot event was held in a local high school on November 22, 2004. Dinner was provided for all participants beforehand in order to set a relaxed, friendly tone.

A Demand for Respect

Early on, a central theme for the residents was the desire to feel more respected by the police.

If you pass in front of a policeman, they will not say hello to you or greet you. They won't even look at you, most of them. If you want to say something to them, they don't give you the opportunity. Why is this? They...should be our friend so that we can live and work together.

New York City resident (Latino, female)³

If [the police were] more educated, more polite, and there was no racism, we would have more security in our communities. As human beings, we would feel freer.

New York City resident (Latino, male)

Police participants could not, of course, directly address the residents' experience of having being disrespected out on the street. The best they could do was try to bridge the gap between themselves and the residents in the room.

I'm Latino—like all of you. I came from the Dominican Republic when I was 14 years of age. My parents are also immigrants, like myself.

New York City police officer (male)⁴

All of us are sworn to enforce the laws impartially, meaning not to show preference toward any particular group or bias against any particular group.

New York City police officer (male)

Language

Many people we encountered throughout our work in New York City felt that in a city with so many non-English speakers the police were simply not doing enough to accommodate them. Not surprisingly, these complaints surfaced early on in this particular dialogue.



When one of my neighbors was going to make a complaint for her stolen car at the precinct, they don't have a person there who speaks Spanish. They have to go to [another] precinct. When they go there, the people that are supposed to be taking down the information, they don't speak Spanish, either.

New York City resident (Latino, female)

I want to inform you that at that precinct they have people who speak Spanish. You go there and you can ask for someone from public relations who speaks Spanish.

New York City police officer (male)

I went there. The woman that was there didn't understand me, because she didn't speak Spanish!

New York City resident (Latino, female)

Another police officer described new initiatives the department is taking to address language barriers.

[Some police have] cell phones when they go on duty that allows them to access a language line. And in about a month every police officer in New York City will be required to carry a language card that lists 43 different languages. If you're injured in the street, the police officer will show you this card. You would point to the language and we would try to get a translator.

New York City police officer (male)

Often, the disconnect between the experiences of participants and the programs and services offered by the police was striking. Still, it did seem helpful for the community members to hear that at least some attempts were under way, even as it became apparent to the police that the measures in place fell far short of what is needed.

Immigration Status

Residents pointed out they were often anxious around police because of fears about deportation. This is especially true in the post-9/11 environment. Many immigrants said they felt police have been less friendly and more aggressive toward them since 9/11. One man said, "I know that after 9/11 the situation with immigrants, especially immigrants without papers, became more difficult. You can be classified as a terrorist; any immigrant can tell you about this."

The police explained that they are prohibited from asking about immigration status when someone is a victim or witness to a crime, something many of the people were interested to learn. However—and here is how dialogue can deepen participants' understanding of a particular



problem—one immigrant pointed out that police can ask about immigration status if they suspect the person is breaking some kind of law.

The police agreed that they will ask about the immigration status of someone who is being arrested. But when asked if this could happen to someone who is confronted for street food vending, one officer commented, “I’ve never heard of anyone being deported for selling tamales. Immigration actually has a list of crimes that you can get deported for, but unlicensed vending isn’t one of them.”

The Importance of Small Gestures

Quite a bit of talk, it turned out, revolved around the attitude and behavior of the police with respect to street food vending, which is an important source of livelihood and culture in the Latino immigrant community. It became clear that this was an area where a little more effort at mutual understanding could go a long way.

Why is it that [the police] have the right to throw out the food [of street vendors] onto the street? I saw how they grabbed the tamales; they threw [them] down to the street. Do they actually have the right to do something like this? Isn't it just sufficient to ... give them a ticket of some sort? They are honest people.

New York City resident (Latino, female)

The food is evidence at that point. Being it is perishable food, we are not allowed to keep it. We have to throw it in the garbage. That's the reason why.

New York City police officer (male)

I have spoken to a lot of people that sell in the streets. They need to understand that justification that you just gave. Instead of just throwing out food [without explanation], it would be a good idea to explain to the people why that is done.

New York City resident (Latino, male)

Perhaps the strongest area of agreement between the residents and the police was the idea that even seemingly small improvements or changes in behavior could go a long way toward alleviating tensions and reducing suspicions.

A lot of things were voiced here. It was a really impressive dialogue. It seems kind of funny that little things like a greeting or finding a way to throw away the tamales that's not humiliating are important. To make a tamale it takes a long, long time. To throw it away takes very little. It is with the little subtle things that we are going to be able in some way to build a better relationship.

LAIC director, Ana Maria Archila



That's part of the answer. We're going to reach out to the community and ask for your assistance in helping to sensitize officers to some of the concerns raised here. Little behaviors that will go a long way to improve things.

New York City police officer (male)

Empowering the Community

Just as in the conversations in San Antonio and New Haven, residents in New York City spoke about the need to shoulder some responsibility for improving relations with police. Officers repeatedly encouraged the residents to get involved and be more civically and even politically engaged, while giving them examples of ways to do exactly that. Residents were informed of monthly precinct community council meetings, civic groups representing different nationalities that will contact police on their behalf as needed and community affairs officers at each precinct who are available for one-on-one appointments.

Participants were happy to receive this information and wanted to make sure others in their community received it as well.

I think that is information we should be getting on the news, in newspapers, in the magazines, anywhere in order for everyone to find out about it.

New York City resident (Latino, male)

This, in turn, led to an idea for working together.

Unfortunately, it's in the Queens Ledger and the Courier, but it's not in the Spanish papers. Does anybody have a contact where we can put it in one of the Spanish papers?

New York City police officer (male)

Toward the end of the dialogue, Ana Maria Archila, director of the Latin American Integration Center, thanked the officers for their invitation to be part of the civic life of the neighborhood but pointed out, "Different people have talked about behavior as one of the main issues. We can talk all we want in here, or in the police precinct council meetings, but the behavior in the streets doesn't seem to get resolved in those meetings." She challenged the officers to follow up in concrete ways. "You are amazingly friendly and open. That's not what people find in the streets—that's a different thing. What are you going to do to bring what happened here tonight back to your department?"

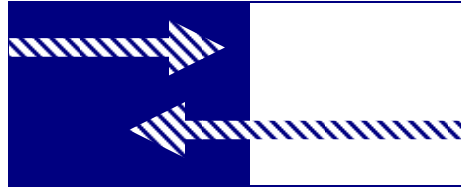


This led a police officer from the local precinct to respond, “I was going to go back to my precinct to speak to every officer [about today’s conversation]. As I was sitting here, I got a better idea. I would like her to speak at one of our roll calls.”

True to his word, the officer later invited Ms. Archila to address officers during roll call, which she has so far done on two occasions. In addition, she traveled with two officers on their patrol, getting a firsthand look at the kind of work they do and the challenges they face, as well as offering the police the chance to speak with a resident in the course of their work.

Just as with the discussions in San Antonio and New Haven, residents and police officers in New York City were highly energized, engaged and respectful of each other. Also as in the other sites, after the official end of the meeting many stayed in the room to speak with one another, and frequently the officers gave out their business cards and contact information. Ms. Archila relayed to Public Agenda that discussion participants almost unanimously told her it was one of the best events they had attended all year.

VI. Conclusions



From Pilot to Practice

How dialogue such as that described in this report might be applied on a larger scale is easy to imagine. Under the umbrella of its community-policing initiatives, departments could partner with local organizations to sponsor and facilitate neighborhood-based forums on any of the discussion topics created for this project—or on other topics specific to their needs. Organizers and moderators can be trained to conduct such public dialogue on an ongoing basis and connect it to police department and community action.

Alternatively, dialogue could begin on the community side, initiated by community-based organizations and their partners, as was the case in the New York City dialogue described in Section V. In either case, organizers and moderators can be trained to build local capacity so that community conversations can become a regular practice of communities and police departments.

Dialogue Can Strengthen Community Policing

Our experiences in this initiative strongly suggest that police-community dialogue offers a powerful tool that complements traditional community policing. Community policing typically manifests in several ways. It engenders a particular attitude (customer friendly, community oriented); it has organizational implications (more police activity organized by neighborhood); and it is programmatic (for instance, creation of neighborhood watch organizations or citizen police academies). But even with all these dimensions, it does not necessarily engage many average citizens throughout the community.

Police officers tend to come into contact with criminals, victims and advocates for or against the department, but not “regular Joes,” observed Sergeant Anthony Trevino, director of research and planning for the San Antonio Police Department. The rewards of dialogue with “regular folks”—increased trust, improved communication, mutual understanding, shared responsibility, new partnerships, improved policies—are exactly the sorts of outcomes that community policing was designed to achieve.

Dialogue Can Strengthen Communities

Behind community policing is the idea that active, organized communities can not only help the police respond more effectively to crime, but prevent it from occurring in the first place. An

important source of support for the latter proposition may be found in the research data emerging from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods.

Under the leadership of Felton Earls, professor of human behavior and development at Harvard University, the Project on Human Development is a landmark study—still in progress—of the impact of communities on youth and families. By observing and comparing scores of Chicago neighborhoods in exceptional detail, Dr. Earls and his research team have begun to influence thinking about law enforcement.

Rather than concentrating on the best ways to respond to criminal activity after the fact (the traditional approach), or targeting quality-of-life crimes on the theory that imposing order and stability creates an atmosphere that stifles more serious crimes (the “broken windows” strategy), Earls’s research supports the notion that the activities of community members themselves are critical to crime prevention. In Earls’s terminology, it is a community’s “collective efficacy”—that is, its ability to organize and address its own problems—that is most likely to keep young people from developing into criminals. As he puts it:

If you got a crew [from outside] to clean up the mess [in a community], it would last for two weeks and go back to where it was. The point of interventions is not to clean up the neighborhood, but to work on its collective efficacy. If you organized a community meeting in a local church or schools, it’s a chance for people to meet and solve problems. If one of the ideas that comes out of the meeting is for them to clean up the graffiti in the neighborhood, the benefit will be much longer lasting and will probably impact the development of kids in that area. But it would be based on community action—not on a work crew coming in from the outside.⁵

Earls’s work, in other words, offers a strong rationale for community-oriented policing, which supports neighborhoods becoming more organized and responsible for preventing the conditions that lead to criminal behavior. And his example in the previous passage about organizing community meetings in which residents can deliberate on their problems and find ways to contribute to their solutions is very much on point regarding our experiments in community dialogue.

One New Haven police officer put it in terms that would probably make good sense to Earls: “You try to help [the community] and see if they want to help themselves. If that’s worth it, the next step is to keep it going.” A New York City police officer appeared to agree:



It's the community that's going to get everybody through everything because of how they stick together. That's the way I see it. You can't live in a neighborhood and say, "Okay, I'm not going to get involved." You have to get involved, because if you don't get involved at all, all chaos and hell breaks loose and no cop can protect you from that. They're not going to put a cop on every block, 24 hours a day. So the community has to take a lot of responsibility for what's going on as well.

Well-designed dialogue can thus not only inform departmental policies and help forge and develop police-community partnerships, it also has the potential to help communities organize themselves and reduce crime in the first place.

It remains to be seen if police departments and communities decide to invest in public dialogue and engagement in this way. We hope that this project, by demonstrating some of the possibilities, can help inform that decision.

Appendix 1

Methodology

Interviews

National Experts

- Dr. Ellen Scrivner, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services at the U.S. Department of Justice
- Wesley G. Skogan, professor of political science and faculty fellow, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University
- Jeremy Travis, president, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York

New Haven

- Carol Anastasio, founder and former executive director of Community Mediation, Inc.
- Robert Caplan, New Haven Civilian Police Review Board member and former board chairman
- Lieutenant John Minardi, New Haven Police Department
- Police Chief Francisco Ortiz, New Haven Police Department
- Charles A. Pillsbury, executive director, Community Mediation, Inc.
- Sharon Stoyer, dialogue project coordinator, Community Mediation, Inc.
- One-on-one interviews with three patrol officers recruited through a market research facility

San Antonio

- Assistant Chief Jerry Pittman, San Antonio Police Department
- Sergeant Gabriel Trevino, San Antonio Police Department
- One-on-one interviews with five patrol officers recruited through a market research facility and two San Antonio Fear Free Environment (community policing) officers recruited by the department

New York City

- Gerard Beekman, special assistant to the civilian police adviser, Civilian Police Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations, and former member of the New York Police Department
- Gregg Roberts, executive vice president and chief operating officer, New York City Police Foundation
- Thomas R. Tyler, professor of psychology, New York University School of Law

- Lori Wilson, assistant director of program services, New York City Police Foundation
- One-on-one interviews with five current members of the New York Police Department, including one female, two Latinos and one African American

Focus Groups

In New Haven, we conducted three focus groups with a cross section of the general public and another with African American residents only. In San Antonio, we conducted one focus group with Latino residents only, one with white residents only and two that mixed the two groups. In New York City, we conducted four focus groups:

- One with residents from Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx (mixed age, ethnicity, income)
- One with people who live or work in lower Manhattan (mixed age, ethnicity, income)
- One with residents of the Crown Heights, Brooklyn, neighborhood (predominantly African American and Caribbean American)
- One with Latino residents of Woodside, Queens (Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico, Peru, Colombia and the Dominican Republic)

Materials Development

In all three sites, the focus groups served two purposes. One was to research the views of police officers and ordinary citizens of different backgrounds. The other was to help us develop dialogue discussion frameworks, each of which offers several alternative approaches to a public safety issue for dialogue participants to weigh and discuss in the course of a session.

For this project, we developed four discussion modules in all:

- Improving Police-Community Relations (in English and Spanish)
- Preventing Crime, Promoting Public Safety
- Ensuring School Safety
- Preventing Terrorism and Protecting Civil Rights

These “choicework discussion starters,” as we call them at Public Agenda, were used as research and dialogue tools in focus groups and the pilot dialogue with police and immigrants.

Pilot Dialogues

We conducted pilot dialogues with the choicework guides. Whereas focus groups are typically relatively homogeneous in their makeup, pilot dialogues bring together people of very different backgrounds. For this project, the dialogues consisted of a cross section of citizens and several

police officers. Two were conducted in New Haven, organized through market research facilities. Two were conducted in San Antonio: one was organized through a market research facility, and the other was organized through the department and held in a police substation. And in New York City, working through the auspices of the Vera Institute for Justice and the Latin American Integration Center, we convened a pilot dialogue with about 30 Queens residents (immigrants from Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and the Dominican Republic) and five police officers (four from the NYPD Community Affairs Division and one from the 115th Precinct—Queens North).

Appendix 2

Four Choicework Discussion Starters for Police-Community Dialogues⁶

Improving police-community relations: What's the best approach?

Introduction

It seems to be a reality of modern urban life that, from time to time, tensions can develop between law enforcement and community members or groups. Given this reality, it is worth doing some thinking about the best ways to prevent these tensions from developing in the first place, and of resolving them when they do.

To help you and your neighbors begin talking about this issue, we've developed a framework that offers three contrasting approaches to improving police-community relations. Which makes the most sense for this community—and why?

Approach 1: Improve Police Accountability

According to this approach, whether it's by a few bad apples or reflects a more systemic problem in a police department, much of the tensions that occur between police and the community come about because of inappropriate police behavior. That being the case, the most important way to help ensure good relations is by having strong accountability measures that enforce proper and professional police conduct. Doing so will help prevent police behaviors that can provoke problems with the community, or promptly identify and address them if they do occur.

Therefore we should:

- Create clear policies about things like racial profiling and car stops.
- Keep careful and systematic records to determine what is actually happening on the streets.
- Put a strong civilian review board in place, so appointed or elected citizens can help investigate and resolve problems that develop.

Those who like this approach say, "Strong accountability can go a long way towards preventing problems that develop between the police and the community."

But those who disagree say, “These traditional accountability measures have been around a long time and still too many problems remain.”

Approach 2: Increase Mutual Understanding

According to this approach, many problems could be avoided, or more easily resolved, if the police better understood the different cultural groups in today’s diverse communities. Likewise, community members need to better understand the nature of police work, including the risks and challenges officers face in their jobs every day, and the reasons for the procedures they use in their work.

Therefore we should:

- Train police in the best ways to interact with the many cultures they come into contact with in today’s diverse society. Hiring more minority policemen or requiring officers to live in the cities where they work might also be effective ways to increase understanding of the community by the police.
- Educate citizens about the risks, challenges and procedures of police work through school programs, community liaison officers and television and newspaper specials.
- Create opportunities for more contact and dialogue between police and community members through citizen watch organizations and well-designed community meetings that allow for the constructive exchange of views.

Those who like this approach say, “The community and the police need to understand each other better if they’re going to avoid the tensions that make things harder for citizens the police alike.”

But those who disagree say, “The best way for the police to have good community relations is to do a professional, effective job fighting crime, and that’s what they should be concentrating on.”

Approach 3: Build Healthier Communities

This perspective recognizes that police can sometimes unnecessarily create problems with community members and groups. But it also recognizes that in communities where there is a lot of crime and instability, there will be a lot more police activity, and in that environment tensions between the police and community groups are virtually inevitable. A great deal of police-community tensions can be avoided if communities take more responsibility for themselves, and transform themselves into healthier, more stable places to live that are less plagued by crime.

This means community members themselves, along with political leaders and other community actors, should work to:

- Revitalize the economy of poor neighborhoods.
- Create more structure and hope for young people by improving their schools and making sure they're supervised and have constructive ways to occupy their time when they're not in school.
- Improve the quality of life by cleaning up parks or organizing citizen watch organizations that make the streets safer.

Those who like this approach say, "Strong, healthy neighborhoods are as much a key to improving relations with the police as anything else."

But those who disagree say, "We can't wait until neighborhoods transform themselves—who knows how long that will take? We need to do things to ensure better police-community relations *now*."

Preventing Crime, Promoting Public Safety What are the right approaches for our community? How can we all work together to make sure they succeed?

Introduction

This community dialogue is designed to bring residents and police officers together to talk about the best ways to reduce crime and promote public safety.

Our discussion will involve three phases:

- First, we will have a brief discussion about people’s thoughts and concerns about crime, public safety, and police work in our community.
- Second, we will look at the pros and cons of different approaches to police work and public safety.
- Finally, we will talk about the current policies and priorities of the police department, so the police can explain them and people can comment on them.

PART ONE: INITIAL THOUGHTS AND CONCERNS

What are your main concerns about crime, public safety and police work?

- Are there specific kinds of crime or public safety issues that you are especially concerned with these days?
- How effective are the police at addressing these challenges?
- How effective are citizens and communities at doing their parts to meet these challenges?

PART TWO: THREE APPROACHES TO REDUCING CRIME

There are a variety of strategies that can guide a police department in its efforts to prevent crime and promote public safety. Some of these strategies may be more effective for a given community than others. To help you better understand the range of strategies that police departments can use, we’ve created a discussion guide that reviews three key approaches.

Of course, you may have additional ideas you’d like to add, or want to combine different ideas together—all of which is fine. But to get our discussion started, let’s review these three major strategies. Which do you think should guide law enforcement work in your community—and why?

Approach 1: Improve Police Procedures for Solving Serious Crime

According to this view, the most important thing we can do to promote public safety is support the police in applying the most advanced methods and technologies in their work combating serious crimes.

From this perspective, we should do things like:

- Make sure police have the best training possible in preventing, investigating and solving crimes.
- Invest in the latest technologies such as computers in patrol cars, state of the art radios, and surveillance technology to investigate criminal activities.
- Apply new effective methods such as daily computerized updates of crime statistics that pinpoint where most serious crimes are occurring and how well the police are doing at stopping them.

Those who like this approach say, “If we want to have an effective police department, we need to keep our eye on the ball by having the best training, technology and procedures possible to combat serious crimes.”

Those who disagree say, “This is an expensive approach, and it does little or nothing to reduce the conditions that lead to crime in the first place, it only responds to them more effectively once they’ve occurred.”

Approach 2: Do sweat the Small Stuff

This approach, sometimes called the “broken windows” strategy, emphasizes the importance of taking seriously, and responding quickly, to small, quality of life crimes (such as broken windows, panhandling, and graffiti). The purpose for doing so is to create an overall environment that’s more orderly and less conducive to crime of any kind.

From this perspective, we should do things like:

- Take petty crimes like graffiti and vandalism seriously and set significant penalties for them
- Have policies that disallow panhandling and vagrancy
- Make a point of seeing that broken windows are fixed and graffiti or abandoned cars are removed promptly by city agencies, so they do not become symbols that encourage rule breaking and social chaos

Those who like this approach say, “If police sweat the small stuff, they not only improve the quality of life in a community, they help stop the big stuff too.”



Those who disagree say, “The community should take responsibility for figuring out how to stop and clean up things like graffiti, and let the police concentrate on the big stuff, like drugs and violent crime.”

Approach 3: Partner with the Community to Fight Crime

This approach (sometimes called “community policing”) emphasizes the importance of communities getting organized to promote public safety and reduce crime. It also emphasizes the police working closely with the community to improve relations and figure out effective ways to work together to promote public safety.

From this perspective, we should do things like:

- Encourage neighborhood watch organizations and help them coordinate their efforts with the police.
- Have more neighborhood-based officers “walking the beat” that get to know a local community well.
- Create opportunities for better communication between community leaders, local organizations and ordinary citizens and police officers.

Those who like this approach say, “When a community is strong, and has good communication and trust with the police, many problems are avoided or more easily dealt with.”

Those who disagree say, “Police work is difficult enough without asking the police to get heavily involved with community dynamics.”

Working Together to Promote School Safety:

What is the Best Approach?

Introduction

Everyone wants schools that are safe, where students, teachers and support staff can concentrate on learning and not have to worry about crime and violence. In this community dialogue, you'll be asked to discuss your ideas on the best way to ensure that schools are safe places for children to learn and grow.

Different approaches to school safety will have different benefits and different costs and challenges. To help you and your neighbors decide what is most important to you, we've created three hypothetical school communities, each of which has approached the issue of school safety in a different way. Which would you want for your own community and schools, and why?

Community 1: Teach students to resolve conflicts peacefully and provide social services to those in need

Television and movies too often teach kids that violence is the answer to conflict with others, and children need to be taught that it's possible to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.

And for those children who are troubled and need extra help, the schools should be providing first-rate guidance and psychological services to detect and counsel such children and their families.

Parents can help by limiting the amount of violent television and movies children see. The community can help by seeing to it that social services for troubled families are adequate.

Those who like this approach often say:

- Kids don't learn to resolve their conflicts by magic, you have to teach them how to do it.
- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



Community 2: Set behavioral standards with clear consequences and make student and their parents accountable

The most important way to change violent behavior is to impose clear consequences for those actions. Schools should employ a zero-tolerance policy that removes violent kids or removes those caught with weapons or drugs.

In addition, parents should be made accountable for the behavior of their children. For example, parents of disruptive kids could be required to attend classes to learn techniques to help keep their children under control.

Parents and the community can help by supporting the school's zero-tolerance policy and helping the schools to make sure that all children and their families understand it clearly.

Those who like this approach often say:

- If the rules and guidelines are clear and if they are enforced, kids will learn to live by them.
- There can be no second-chances when violence and weapons are involved.

Community 3: Enhance school security and reinforce this in the community

Things like zero-tolerance policies and conflict resolution training distract educators from their central mission -- teaching.

Your police or private security forces are equipped and trained to handle violent and disruptive students. Metal detectors and a security presence will best deter and control school violence and permit educators to focus on their jobs.

Parents and the community can help by supporting the school's policy and making sure there are the necessary funds to install metal detectors and maintain an adequate security presence.

Those who like this approach often say:

- Violent and disruptive students should be handled by security professionals.
- A secure environment is one in which kids can focus on learning and school staff can focus on teaching.

Preventing Terrorism and Protecting Civil Liberties: What's the Right Approach for Law Enforcement in Our Community?

Introduction

Local law enforcement plays a critical role in the fight against terrorism. Officers identify and guard likely targets, generate intelligence through informants, undercover work and technology, and coordinate with federal authorities. And, should prevention fail, they are among the first responders who try to minimize the damage.

How can law enforcement officers be most effective in fighting terrorism? Do they need new powers, technologies and procedures? What role, if any, should the community play in these efforts?

Moreover, how should we deal with tradeoffs we might face with respect to our privacy and civil liberties? Under what conditions—if at all—are we willing to carry new forms of identification, be video-taped, have our emails scanned, or be profiled in various ways? How can infringement on civil liberties be avoided, or at least minimized, while we work to maintain our security?

Our discussion today asks how law enforcement and communities might best approach these challenges. To help us get started, we will review three basic positions that people might take. You may also have additional ideas you'd like to add—we'll just use these three approaches as a way to get a discussion started.

Approach 1: The community should support the police in their efforts to prevent terrorism

According to this perspective, we should encourage law enforcement professionals to aggressively fight against terrorism. They are the professionals who put their lives on the line, and they should have our support. As for concerns about civil liberties, if we have to lose some privacy in order to be safe, so be it. Besides, we can trust the accountability mechanisms that are already in place, such as civilian review boards and internal affairs, to keep things from getting out of hand.

This means we should do things like make sure law enforcement is funded at adequate levels, and accept inconveniences and less privacy if they make us safer.

Those who like this approach say it frees local law enforcement to concentrate on fighting terrorism with as few distractions as possible and as many resources as they need.

Those who disagree say it is too likely to lead to abuses that threaten our civil liberties and freedom, which must not be sacrificed in the name of security.

Approach 2: The community should act as a watchdog to ensure that civil liberties are protected as the police fight terrorism

Of course the community should encourage local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to protect us against terrorism. But the community must also protect itself against abuses in case law enforcement goes too far, or we could lose the freedoms and civil liberties that our nation was founded to promote.

Therefore, we should organize our community, stay alert to abuses, and turn to political and legal action when necessary to combat abuses if they do occur.

Those who like this approach say our civil liberties are too important to take for granted. We must protect them even as we protect ourselves against terrorism.

Those who disagree say this approach will to create too many distractions for law enforcement, who should be focusing on preventing terrorism, not fighting political battles or court cases.

Approach 3: The community should be an active partner with the police in efforts to fight terrorism and protect civil liberties

The community must do more than either blindly support the police or keep a distrustful eye on them. It must become an active partner with the police through what are called “community policing strategies.”

This means being willing to deal with terror warnings rather than tuning them out, forming neighborhood watch groups, and creating community mechanisms to help deal with such complex issues as profiling and police-community relations.

Those who like this approach say the best way to prevent both terrorism and the abuse of civil liberties is through good communication and close cooperation between the police and the community.

Those who disagree say this all sounds very nice, but the stakes are too high to indulge in impractical ideas. Most New Yorkers are too busy to get involved in this kind of thing, and the police are too under-staffed to pull people off of more critical assignments so they can spend time "making nice" with the public.

Endnotes

1. One professional association describes community policing as “a collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems. With the police no longer the sole guardians of law and order, all members of the community become active allies in the effort to enhance the safety and quality of neighborhoods.” From “Understanding Community Policing,” *Community Policing Consortium Monograph*, 1994.
2. Study Circles, whose work we greatly respect, is one of the few organizations we know of that has done important dialogue work on police-community relations. From what we’ve seen, their work on this theme is more or less consistent with ours—although certainly not identical in terms of precise methodology and content (see www.studycircles.org).

In addition to dialogue on the topic of police-community *relations*, this project explored dialogue on three other themes: “Preventing Crime, Promoting Public Safety,” “Ensuring School Safety,” and “Preventing Terrorism and Protecting Civil Rights.”
3. Quotes from the pilot dialogue are taken from an English-language transcription of the event. During the event, most immigrants spoke in Spanish, and their responses were consecutively translated into English. (English speakers’ comments and responses were likewise translated into Spanish.) As a result of the translation, the immigrants’ comments might at times seem a bit stiff and unnatural to the reader.
4. Because this session was audio taped rather than videotaped, we could not be sure of the race/ethnicity of the officers making comments, so we do not identify that variable as we do in other parts of the document.
5. Dr. Felton Earls, quoted in Dan Hurley, “On Crime as Science (a Neighbor at a Time),” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2004. The story of the Ten Point Coalition, the church-led initiative credited with playing a major role in reducing the youth murder rate in inner-city Boston, also offers a telling story on the impact that self-organizing communities can have in reducing crime. (See, for instance, “The Lord’s Foot Soldiers,” by Allison Samuels, David Gordon and Steve Rhodes, *Newsweek*, June 1, 1998.)
6. Each of these four choicework guides is available as a booklet from Public Agenda or can be downloaded in PDF format from the public engagement section of our Web site (www.publicagenda.org).



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