



Community Engagement in Place-Based Policing

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Overview

What is community engagement and why is it important?

Challenges of community engagement

Strategies for authentic collaboration

Key takeaways



What is community engagement?

**We tend to think of
community engagement
as a set of *outcomes*...**

But what if we reframed
it as a *prerequisite* to
effective, ethical,
democratic policing?

Importance of community

The foundation of all social institutions

Police 'for and of the people' – must balance maintenance of public safety with trust and confidence

“Co-production of public safety” as a cornerstone of democratic policing

> Think of all policing initiatives as tactics to accomplish the goal of establishing community trust and legitimacy

Some of the most effective prevention programs involve collaborative, multi-stakeholder efforts and community problem-solving.

Benefits of engagement

Police do not have **capacity or knowledge** to address all the underlying causes of crime at place

Coordinating multiple partners within a specific geographic area leads to **effective, localized solutions**

Community participation ensures **diverse voices are represented** and **mitigates alienating effects of law enforcement**



Challenges in community engagement

Challenges of engagement

Authenticity and representation

Leadership and expertise

Data and outcomes

Authentic representation

Many 'community-oriented' policing programs **don't involve real collaboration**, or there is resistance

Real participation takes **time, effort, and attention** – especially in places where relationships with police are historically strained

Engaging multiple communities at a place takes effort – how to balance competing interests?

Leadership and expertise

Police are used to being the 'experts' on crime prevention but **may not have all the expertise**

Need to exercise caution when deciding **who speaks for the community**

Consider how other stakeholders and institutions have historically **served or harmed** the community

Data and outcomes

What is the **data generation process**? Does it reflect community concerns or perpetuate harms?

Outcomes for specific programs can be “fragile” – how do we measure the **success and sustainability** of the partnership itself?

How are measures of success impacted by **increased community trust and collaboration**?



Strategies for authentic collaboration

See Gill et al. (2024) for a literature review

Strategies for collaboration

Cultivating engagement

Building capacity

Avoiding assumptions

Cultivating engagement

Active participation with real empowerment and ownership

Strategic mobilization to turn participation into action

Culturally appropriate **outreach and recruitment** to ensure diverse stakeholders are at the table

Building capacity

Enhancing **communication** and **conflict resolution** skills

Developing **internal processes** to build a culture of trust, equity, and shared vision

Developing expectations for **leadership, roles and responsibilities**, and **participation**

Developing a **clear implementation and evaluation plan**

Avoiding assumptions

Even in communities that face many problems, there is **capacity for collective action**

Communities that experience high crime rates **may desire law enforcement support**

There is considerable **power, reach, and historical knowledge** within grassroots community organizations



Considerations for predictive policing

Engagement strategies

Engage diverse community stakeholders **early in the process** (prior to purchase/deployment) AND **throughout**

Incorporate community voice into decisions about **where** to deploy technology; **what** data will be collected and **how** it will be used; balancing **privacy** and **civil rights with public safety**

> Guiding principle: Do the data and locations reflect the issues that are most important to the community?

Key takeaways

Interventions must align with community needs

Pay attention to relationship and capacity building, not just solving the problem

Community voices should be centered throughout program development, implementation, and outcome measurement

Thank you

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Additional resources

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