In the last few years, American law enforcement has accepted (begrudgingly at times) the notion that community relations is an important and even indispensable part of police work. In doing so, it has recaptured the old belief that a police force can and should be “the people’s police”—an agency that is responsive to the public it serves.

Philosophically, not every officer agrees, and practically, the nature of community relations varies widely from agency to agency, community to community, but change has occurred. Awareness and acceptance of community relations—the process of developing and maintaining meaningful, two-way communication between the agency, its service area, and specific populations served, aims to identify, define, and resolve problems of mutual concern—have increased.

**STUDYING THIS CHAPTER WILL ENABLE YOU TO:**

1. Provide an overview of police-community relations and their impact on the police system.
2. Explain how police-community relations are complex interactions among a multitude of internal and external communities.
3. Define the people’s police and community.
4. Describe the evolution of police-community relations programs in the United States.
5. Identify the current status of and prospects for police-community relations.

THE POLICE-COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Of all the issues that affect the police in the United States, none is more important than the manner in which the police and the public interrelate. Despite our democratic traditions (or perhaps because of them), we in the United States have been slow to accept the concept that “police are the public and the public the police” (Barker, Hunter, and Rush, 1994). Yet the police and the community are not only interdependent, but are in fact inseparable from one another.

Readers, both police and civilian, may find it difficult to accept the assertion that police and community are inseparable. If one adheres to the traditional concept of police-community relations (as shown in Figure 1.1), such a statement may actually seem ludicrous. Typically, the police have responded to pressure from politicians and others who have reacted to complaints from groups or individual citizens regarding police procedures. Such an isolationist view has perpetuated an “us against them” mentality that has detracted from police-community interaction.

However, if one adheres to the more contemporary view that the individuals within various police organizations are but a microcosm of the general society and that this society is composed of numerous interrelated communities, the previous assertion is valid. Today’s police organizations are not isolated monoliths that are impervious to the communities they serve. The police organization is not a unified community. Nor is there a single community to which they respond. There are in actuality a myriad of sometimes cooperating, often competing communities that are constantly influencing and being influenced by one another.

![Figure 1.1 Traditional police-community relations.](image-url)
Police organizations are in truth very responsive to this rapidly changing “community environment.” To understand police-community interaction, it is necessary for the student of police to realize that there are constant exchanges among the various communities that exist both inside and outside the police organization. Figure 1.2 demonstrates how these “exchange relationships” (Cole and Smith, 1997) between communities occur.

As displayed in Figure 1.2, the police organization comprised a number of internal communities engaged in constant interaction with one another. These internal communities are engaged in numerous individual and group exchanges with a myriad of external communities. Within the overlapping communities displayed are those groups from which both the internal and external communities are comprised.

DEFINING POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

As argued in the preceding section, there is no one “community” that is served by the police. Instead, there are numerous communities that make up an often indefinable “public.” As a result, “public opinion” is usually not a clear consensus of viewpoint within a nation, state, county, or municipality but a chorus of differing opinions from various communities.

![Figure 1.2 Contemporary police-community relations.](image-url)
Police-community relations are complicated and constantly changing interactions between representatives of the police organization and an assortment of governmental agencies, public groups, and private individuals representing a wide range of competing and often conflicting interests.

Throughout this book we focus our discussion of police and community interaction on both the external communities outside the police organization and the internal communities within the police organization. Our primary contention is that successful police-community relations must take into account exchange relationships among community groups located both inside and outside the police organization. To be successful, these exchange relations depend on feedback from the internal and external community groups. Feedback leads to improvement and goal attainment. The isolated police agencies of the past failed to recognize that their success, however defined, required feedback from the community and the citizens served.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Secrecy and institutional separation have ceased to be defensible positions for police agencies to take in relation to the communities they serve. Although secrecy and institutional separation have not totally disappeared, it is valid to state that in less than two decades the most insular of all institutions in American society is becoming committed, at least in principle, to programs of ongoing exchanges with the community and with other agencies about its mandate and practices.

The concept of police-community relations has gained a secure level of acceptance in the law enforcement establishment and in urban government. Acceptance, in a working sense, means that proposals to establish and maintain such programs have a fair chance of success. There are no longer any organized factions publicly opposing police efforts to open and cultivate channels of communication with the public in general and with civic groups and social movements in particular. Whether those who were aligned against such attempts are now merely silent for the time being, or whether they have changed their views, is an open question. But there is no doubt that activities included under the heading of police-community relations are achieving respectability, and that a large and growing number of police officials in positions of responsibility have come to view them as indispensable for effective law enforcement and peacekeeping.

ACCEPTANCE AS A SIGN OF PROGRESS

This acceptance alone is a sign of progress, a remarkable achievement. It is, however, only a first step toward implementation. It is much easier to agree with the reasonableness and justice of a proposal than to implement it and live with the consequences of its implementation. Above all, when the task is to decide what must and can be done, it is important to measure aspirations against resistance, inertia, and regression. For example, despite the acceptance of the principle of police-community relations, few, if any, actually functioning police-community relations
programs are fully deserving of the name. For that matter, Moore (1992:102) states that “no police department in the United States can today be accurately characterized as community policing or problem-oriented policing departments.”

A positive statement of present circumstances is that although newly functioning programs have been accepted in principle, the kinds of activities that total acceptance would lead one to expect have yet to be implemented. However, as we shall see, there is definitely reason to be optimistic. American policing in the twenty-first century has come a long way since it was transplanted from England. Nevertheless, the current “War on Terrorism,” brought on by the attacks on the United States, and the resulting economic crisis will have effects on American policing, particularly in the area of funding. Recent events will also increase the need for good police-community relations among the police and certain minority communities.

**TIGHT FINANCES AND THEIR EFFECTS**

In times of tight finances, new and existing programs must compete for reduced funding and for human resources with other programs that meet long-established police obligations (e.g., crime, traffic, and vice control). In such circumstances it becomes necessary to demonstrate a high level of cost-effectiveness in meeting police goals. Often, community relations programs become locked into quick and relatively safe ways of demonstrating success: (1) “busywork” activities, which show that something is happening and presumably goals are being accomplished and (2) solving easy problems and postponing (sometimes indefinitely) the more difficult ones (e.g., maintaining contact with civic and political groups that are receptive to the police and failing to reach out to those that are not receptive).

Such difficulties can arise with virtually any kind of program in which success is expected. The way police-community relations programs have developed seems to pose some unique difficulties for these programs in particular.

**A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**Nineteenth-Century Origins**

The concept of police-community relations is not new. When Sir Robert Peel undertook the reorganization of the London police forces with the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829, he and the two key commissioners that he appointed, Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, emphasized that the police should work in cooperation with the people and that members of the office should protect the rights, serve the needs, and earn the trust of the population they policed (Critchley, 1967; Reith, 1952).

Writing at the turn of the century, Melville Lee discussed Peel’s principles of law enforcement. The following excerpts from Lee’s text retain the flavor of the period in which they were written. They also reflect many of the concepts of police-community relations that are being proposed today. According to Lee, police officers are “public servants in the fullest sense of the term.”
It should be understood at the outset that the principal object to be attained is the prevention of crime. To this great end every effort of the police is to be directed.

The absence of crime will be considered the best proof of the complete efficiency of the police.

... There is no qualification more indispensable to a police officer than a perfect command of temper, never suffering himself to be moved in the slightest degree by any language or threats that may be used; if he does his duty in a quiet and determined manner, such conduct will probably induce well-disposed bystanders to assist him should he require it.

... What is wanted is the respect and approval of all good citizens.

The wisdom of fostering cordial relations between the people and the civil defenders of their lives and properties seems so obvious, that it is a source of wonder that so little attention has been given to the study of how best to promote this desirable entente cordiale.

The police ... are simply a disciplined body of men, specially engaged in protecting “masses” as well as “classes,” from any infringement of their rights on the part of those who are not law-abiding.

... It is necessary also that they [the public] should be acquainted with the conditions that govern the mutual relationship.

We are well served by our police because we have wisely made them personally responsible for their actions.

... That is to say, the modern system rests, as the ancient one did, on the sure foundation of mutual reliance. (Lee, 1971)

These principles were imported into U.S. police departments. In a way, they had to be: There was strenuous opposition to establishing organized police forces on the grounds that they would be the exclusive organ of executive government and indifferent to public influence. They would function against the people, resulting in a “police state.” Opposition was in part silenced by assurances that the new institution would be “the people’s police” (Astor, 1971).

In many ways the institution focused on the needs of the people. Engaging in community service activities is a part of the American police heritage (see Figure 1.3). As Zumbrun (1983) noted, “During the early part of the 20th century, the New York City Police Department engaged in such non-stereotyped activities as massive Christmas parties for poverty-stricken children and their families, engaging in job hunts for released prisoners from Sing Sing prison and other non-crime fighting endeavors.”
The “police state” issue did not die. World War II and many wars and cold war struggles before and since have been waged against so-called police states. In many European countries and in the United States, the police worked hard to disassociate themselves from such a label in the aftermath of World War II. Still, many Americans found adequate evidence to support the view that during their first century of existence in the United States, the police were often corrupt agents of boss-dominated urban governments (Berkley, 1969).

SELLING THE POLICE TO THE PEOPLE

The reformers of the 1950s felt that it was necessary to overcome the attitudes of contempt that middle-class citizens held toward police and, literally, to sell the police to the people. This was done by sending speakers to high schools, to business luncheons, to meetings of civil organizations, and so on. These speakers argued that the police are the “thin blue line,” the last bulwark of defense against the dark forces of crime and disorder.

Three key elements were notable in these efforts:

1. At their best, the police employed highly sophisticated techniques of advertising, selling, and, of course, public relations.
2. To police the “public” in a public relations sense, meant, essentially, policing middle-class adults and youth (“solid citizens” and their offspring).
3. No attempt was made to improve the “product”; the programs were designed solely to improve the police “image”; there was little or no provision to recommend or effect needed changes in departmental policy or procedures.
Although these police-community contacts were chosen very selectively, in the 1950s they did constitute a movement away from the exclusive dominance of police departments by city-hall bosses.

The 1960s: From Public Relations to Community Relations

At the beginning of the 1960s, the police had reason to believe their public relations programs had been successful. But then minorities, disaffected young people, the poor, recent immigrants, antiwar activists, and street people made new claims and demands. Their quarrel was with the “system,” or with society as a whole, but their confrontations were often with the police, who usually responded with force. One lesson should have been clear: Public relations programs designed to appeal to “solid citizens” were ineffective in dealing with the disadvantaged and the aggrieved—many of whom were openly hostile to the police.

Something else was needed—police-community relations—where community was defined realistically to include, as one anonymous reviewer of this text stated; all of the “stratified, segmentalized, unintegrated, and differential environments where police work.” This focus includes precisely those segments of society ignored by the earlier public-relations approach. New police-community relations programs were built on the foundations of already existing public relations programs.

The San Francisco Community Relations Unit

In the mid-1950s, the Metropolitan Police Department of St. Louis, Missouri, established a public relations division that became known as one of the best-functioning programs of its kind in the country (School of Police Administration, 1967). The division contained a speakers’ bureau, published a newsletter, organized citizens’ councils, and maintained school contacts, all of which were considered to be effective in accordance with their aims. There were also police and community relations committees in housing projects, which, in the department’s own estimate, did not function well even as late as 1966. Nevertheless, the undertaking as a whole had an enviable reputation. In 1962, Chief Thomas Cahill of San Francisco visited St. Louis to help obtain answers to his own problems. Chief Cahill realized that it was important to use other resources, not just physical force, to deal with outbreaks of discontent. His department was faced with student protests against hearings being conducted in San Francisco City Hall by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Chief Cahill took the new director of his community relations program, Lieutenant Dante Andreotti, to St. Louis to study that city’s methods. Cahill and Andreotti went to St. Louis to learn because they had a problem on their hands; their problem, however, was quite different from the situation that had motivated the St. Louis department. The St. Louis program was formulated primarily to address the “solid citizens.” No one considered the program seriously impaired by the fact that the project that was directed toward working with the disadvantaged and the aggrieved did not function.

In the ensuing years, Lieutenant Andreotti developed a program in San Francisco that was vastly different from the St. Louis program. The direction of work that was permitted to lie fallow in St. Louis became the central interest of the San...
Francisco community relations unit. While Andreotti commanded the unit, “community relations” meant working primarily with the disadvantaged and the aggrieved segments of the population. The unit’s officers were attached to organizations such as the Youth Opportunity Center, which served ghetto youngsters, and the Office of Economic Opportunity. They also exerted themselves to meet with, talk and listen to, and help people living in the Tenderloin, the city’s skid row, and its ghetto. The activities of the San Francisco unit are illustrated by the following example:

A robbery and beating of a white grocery store operator in a minority group neighborhood resulted in community-wide concern, and tension. As a result of the efforts of the police and the community relations unit, together with minority group leaders, a group of youngsters (many of whom had juvenile records) were organized into a picket line which marched back and forth in front of the store carrying signs condemning violence and stating that they were ashamed of what had happened. Although the boys picketing were not involved in the robbery or the beating, they offered verbal apologies to the family of the victim for the act done by members of their race. The publicity given this parade by the various media communications resulted in an almost immediate lessening of tensions. (School of Police Administration, 1967, p. 49)

This incident should not be taken as indicating the scope of the unit’s program nor even its focal concerns. The routine work of the officers assigned to the unit concentrated much more on everyday kinds of predicaments, such as protecting persons who were not resourceful on their own or helping persons with police records find employment or lodgings. The officers acted upon the realization that life in the city comprises many conditions, circumstances, and troubled people. They worked on the assumptions that ex-cons without jobs are likely to commit crimes again; intergroup tension may lead to violent confrontations; children without recreational facilities tend to get into mischief; and so on. When such potential is not checked, it leads to consequences that will sooner or later have to be handled by detectives, riot squads, or juvenile officers, depending on the specific situation.

Those in the San Francisco community relations unit were not the first police officers ever to help a former criminal find a job, nor were they the first to succeed in preventing a public disorder. Their innovation was in two additional aspects of their work. First, they did not simply go out to solve some problem; rather, they always dealt with problems in conjunction with other community resources. In the previous example, they worked together with minority group leaders. Cooperation was not simply a convenient expedient; it involved an established and ongoing mutually cooperative arrangement between members of the police and members of the community. Second, persons in the unit felt that providing services to citizens was their primary job. In the past such services were rendered on rare occasions and only after the officers took care of more demanding crime control problems.

The establishment of the community relations unit in San Francisco meant that personnel resources were specifically assigned to the task of working cooperatively with the people. More important, the chief of the department referred to the
existence of the unit with pride. He claimed credit for creating it and gave weight to its importance by having its commanding officer report directly to the office of the chief, rather than through the chain of command. Nevertheless, some commanding officers and several line officers did not like the unit. Yet even without total acceptance within the department, the unit gained momentum. It soon was regarded locally and nationally as conspicuously successful.

Although others considered the unit to be a success, its commander, Lieutenant Andreotti, recognized the problems that still had to be faced and spoke about them at a law enforcement conference in 1968:

It is my belief that there isn’t a successful police-community program anywhere in the country today, in terms of commitment by all members of the law enforcement agency. There have been successful police-community relations units, but practically all of them have been frustrated in their efforts to get the rank and file involved to the point of a genuine, personal interest and commitment. (Andreotti, 1971, p. 120)

**Police-Community Relations Since the 1960s**

The themes of the 1970s were Vietnam, the Watergate scandal of the Nixon administration, inflation, and the energy crisis. Compared with the 1960s, the 1970s were relatively subdued, except for a notable and disturbing increase in violence. It was a period of “finding” oneself, or, as it was called, the “Me Decade.”

Out of the turmoil of the 1960s, and based on the findings of several presidential commissions, funding was made available through the Federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration for research, education and training, and projects of criminal justice agencies designed to reduce crime. Law enforcement agencies had the opportunity to develop and implement new programs—and they did. Many were described as community relations projects and some of those were innovative and elaborate. Many, in practice, were simply public relations activities. Few were carefully evaluated. As federal funding for them ended, many projects ended. Others, not necessarily as originally conceived, are still part of agency function today.

During the 1980s, the increasing fear of crime throughout U.S. society resulted in a transition of focus from enhancing relations with minority communities to providing reassurances to the general public that crime was not running rampant. Crime prevention units became popular with police agencies throughout the nation. These units served not only as a means of educating the public about crime prevention strategies but also became valuable tools for enhancing public perceptions of the police.

In addition to developing crime prevention units, the police also sought to enhance their relationships with the media. Specialized public information units sprang into existence across the country in agencies that previously had sought to suppress information. These units not only made information more accessible to the media and civic groups but also promoted support for police programs.
The results of the previous strategies led progressive police administrators to seek out new programs in which the public could become more actively involved with their police agencies. An array of community liaison units, school resource programs, joint police-community activities, and enhanced civilian oversight of police operations were experimented with. The culmination of these efforts is community-oriented policing, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Despite the advances in police-community relations since the 1960s, few programs receive the total support of their agencies. Andreotti’s concern, first voiced in 1968 continues to be a community relations concern as we enter the new century. In terms of commitment by all members of law enforcement agencies, the status of police-community relations has not changed dramatically since 1968.

The rise of gangs in the inner cities and their rapid spread to suburban America, the detrimental effects of a flourishing illicit drug trade, the dramatic increase in hate crimes by both right-wing extremists and frustrated minorities, as well as the fear and instability produced by a declining economy demonstrate the need for enhanced police-community relations. The riots in Los Angeles and other major cities during the 1960s served to motivate police agencies to begin police-community relations. The distrust and resentment of police expressed in many U.S. cities following the Los Angeles riot of 1992, provoked by the acquittal of police officers charged with beating an African-American motorist, also served as the catalyst for new developments in police-community relations.

A strong economy, a decline in violent crime, and more responsiveness on the part of the police to citizen complaints yielded positive results as the 1990s ended. However, the 1999 shooting death of an African immigrant by the New York City Police and the reactions of African-American activists to that shooting have reignited tensions, in that city and elsewhere. The three day riot (April 7–10, 2001) in Cincinnati, Ohio, following a police shooting of an unarmed black male demonstrates that there are still fragile relationships between the police and certain community groups. Currently, one of the major issues facing U.S. policing are claims that police officers and police departments are engaged in racial profiling or racially biased policing, particularly in the areas of traffic stops and searches. These events demonstrate that we still have far to go.

The Police and Social Work

Even under the best circumstances, community relations programs suffer both from neglect and from being given low priority by police departments. Many police officers have little interest in community relations programs, and even resist and condemn them. Social problems, as the thinking in police circles sometimes goes, are best left to social workers; they are not “proper” police business (i.e., they have little to do with preventing people from committing crimes and with bringing them to justice when they do). This view persists. Academy training often continues to focus predominantly on “crime fighting” behavior, even though it is generally known that the major portion of police work (some references note as high as 80 percent) is social service–related rather than “crime fighting” behavior.
To say that only social workers should deal with these problems is similar to arguing that a champion swimmer should not pull a drowning person from the water unless the swimmer has a Red Cross life-saving certificate. Commitment to the principles of police-community relations means acting on the assumption that the police are a service organization dedicated to keeping the peace, to the defense of the rights of the people, and to the enforcement of laws. In all these fields, they are not merely independent instruments of government; rather, they must work with individuals, community groups, and community institutions to achieve desired objectives.

It was this latter attitude that governed the intervention of the San Francisco community relations unit in the incident mentioned previously. This incident is a good example of commitment to the principles of police-community relations on the level of departmental organization. It is not clear in this case at which point community leaders would be told to stay out of it and let the experts take over (and the community relations unit would move on to the next case). Typically, that would be most likely to occur as procedures leading to the apprehension and trial of the assailants were set into motion.

Such a move may seem appropriate. Citizens are not expected to be involved in “catching criminals.” In fact, when they insist upon becoming involved, police believe that they are likely to cause more harm than good. This is also the view of many judges, public prosecutors, city council members, and citizens. Thinking in terms of isolated offenses, it is difficult to reason otherwise.

Thus, even those who are in favor of genuine police-community relations are forced to agree that the work must be assigned to special units that work independently while the rest of policing takes its ordinary course. In other words, progressive departments establish external units to deal with their communities, but these units must follow the department’s conditions. In still different terms, it appears that accepting the principles of police-community relations in its presently exclusively outward-oriented direction (somewhat in the way nations send envoys to other nations) does not mean that two-way police-community relations are the norm (or, to continue the analogy, that the other nations send them envoys).

This situation is not unique. The police are not alone in thinking that they can communicate adequately with the people by means of external ambassadors. Indeed, they have done better with this approach than have other institutions. The educational system, for example, keeps parents at arm’s length while pretending to allow involvement by letting assistant principals of schools deal with the PTA. Similarly, institutions that deliver medical services often do not even pretend to communicate with the people they serve. In each of these cases, it is argued that lay people could not possibly contribute to solving the problems of a slow-learning child or a diabetic patient, just as it is said that lay people could not be helpful in solving a robbery.

All communities have educational needs, health needs, and law enforcement and peacekeeping needs. It is neither proper nor efficient for the specialists alone to define the nature of these needs nor the way in which they will be met. Specialists bring competence and skills to bear on meeting these needs, but they must communicate with lay citizens to determine what those needs are.
The Success of Police-Community Relations

The establishment of police-community relations units is a first, long step in recognition of the usefulness of bringing needs and special resources together in a harmonious relationship. Nevertheless, it is just that—a first step. The establishment of community–police relations, in a much broader sense, is a logical next step. An example might help in making clear what this involves.

It is commonly accepted that the ghettos of our cities produce a disproportionately large number of people who are arrested for criminal activities and that people living in these ghettos are exposed to a far greater risk of being criminally victimized than are other citizens. Finally, it is no secret that people living in these areas distrust the police and often are reluctant to help officers in their efforts to control crime. What would be more sensible, for the police to consider these three facts, together, with their present ways of dealing with suspects and victims, as systematically related? Joint consideration of the larger problem suggests that a successful attack on the problem can come only from the establishment of a program of trusting and fully cooperative relations between ghetto communities and the police.

The reversal of terms for police-community relations to community-police relations was not done simply to coin a new term. It does not matter what the arrangement is called. What matters is that the full effectiveness of the program cannot be attained merely by having a special unit to implement it. At best, such units can only succeed in doing an occasional good deed and putting out an occasional fire, while leaving the rest of the police department’s work unaffected by even these accomplishments. Creating a special unit which has the responsibility for effective community relations has four adverse consequences (Moore, 1992, p. 135):

First, by isolating the function in a special unit, the unit becomes vulnerable to organizational ridicule. The community relations units become known as the “grin and wave” or “rubber gun” squads.

Second, after a special unit is formed, everyone else in the department is seemingly relieved of responsibility for enhancing community relations.

Third, if the community relations unit should obtain important information about community concerns or ways in which the community might be able to help the department, it is difficult to make those observations heard in the department. Department members are not receptive to bad news or unwelcome demands; after all, that is the responsibility of the unit to stamp out dissent in the community.

Fourth, the organization no longer looks for other ways to improve community relations.

Success of community-police relations requires a “people’s police” attitude. Rank-and-file officers need to recognize that the police are a service organization dedicated to keeping the peace, defending the rights of the people, and enforcing
the laws. Community-policing relations is a broad, two-way program that involves every officer, not just a special unit.

**INTERNALIZING COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

Perhaps it would be easiest to explain the concept of incorporating community relations into police work by first discussing what it does not mean.

**What “Community Relations” Does Not Mean**

- **Making entire departments do what police-community relations units do now.** Special programs would remain the responsibility of the units, just as other units in police agencies also have special responsibilities. Although support for programs needs to be broadly based, it would be inefficient to have all units specializing in all programs.

- **Weakening law enforcement.** Viewing crime as a social problem does not imply that crime control would be “soft.” Actually, police might become more strongly dedicated to crime control than they are now, and possibly become more effective in that task. Improved community relations would be a tool, or organizational strategy, used in crime control.

- **Close involvement with partisan politics.** Mobilizing support for police-community relations at state, county, and community levels may involve working with “political” figures and organizations, but it is a position that is not partisan, conservative, or liberal. It is a method for doing police work that considers the distribution of political forces in any community and seeks the cooperation of all.

- **“Bending” to community pressures.** Clearly, this is a danger in the face of conflicting demands, but risks can be contained provided that responsiveness to community needs and demands is not interpreted as bargaining away the police mandate. Because openness is reciprocal, the risk can become an opportunity for citizens to understand and respect the police mandate in society.

- **Turning police officers into social workers.** Social interaction is a critical part of police work, and police perform “social” work as part of their everyday tasks. The basic functions of social work, according to Siporin (1975), are to develop, maintain, and strengthen the social welfare system so that it can meet basic human needs; to ensure adequate standards of subsistence, health, and welfare for all; to enable people to function optimally within their social institutional roles and statuses; and to support and improve the social order and institutional structure of society (Siporin, 1975, pp. 13–14). Police also are involved in such a function as part of the overall mission of a service organization, dedicated to keeping the peace, defending the rights of the people, preventing crime, and enforcing laws. The common interests are apparent,
but the professional specialty and the context within which each function may vary (see also Friedlander and Apte, 1980, pp. 111–22). Improving police-community relations in all aspects of police work will allow officers to be more effective public servants while exercising the full range of their proper police duties and service responsibilities.

What “Community Relations” Does Mean

- *Reviving the ideas of “the people’s police”*. This is the basic notion on which modern, urban police departments were founded. Needs for police service must be determined on the basis of ongoing communication between the people and the police.
- *A more reasoned basis for police work*. Police officers usually operate with a repertoire of responses determined by penal codes, municipal ordinances, and demands of the often recurrent types of situations and emergencies with which they deal. The police-community relations concept encourages police to deal with complex problems in complex ways, going beyond traditional constraints and procedures where necessary (see Bittner, 1970).
A deeper, more comprehensive interest in human life. To some, this phrase may sound sentimental, and to others, unnecessary, because many effective police officers now operate with humanity and compassion. Still, many police officers do not find it improper to adopt cynical attitudes toward human life. The police-community relations approach, by contrast, stresses that police are both entitled and required to take an interest in and help to resolve human problems.

An acceptance of the view that “relations” is a process, not a product. It is vital, ongoing, and constantly changing. It requires mutual respect and mutual exchange and cannot be compartmentalized if it is to be effective. Feedback is a necessary ingredient of this process. The community and its groups must be encouraged to provide feedback to the people’s police, and the police in turn must provide feedback to the community.

SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES

A system is a set of elements, or components, interacting with each other. These elements may be physiological—as in organic systems in the human body, individuals within a family, groups of individuals as in a police department—or groups of systems, as in the criminal justice system. Systems, according to systems theory, are guided by major principles, which include these:

1. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. Elements of a system interact in repetitive patterns.
3. A change in one part of the system will reverberate throughout the system (transactional reciprocity).
4. Interactions are governed by a set of rules.
5. Systems tend to maintain a balance among the elements.
6. Open systems exchange energy, or information flow, with the surrounding environment (Norgard and Whitman, 1980).

Feedback/Input

Important to the systems analogy, and the theme throughout this book, is the element of feedback, or information flow (mentioned in 6 above). Feedback/input separates public relations from police-community relations (discussed in Chapter 2) and is essential for improving the relationships between the police and their communities. As systems interact with their environments (internal and external), they receive feedback from these environments. In the past, police agencies ignored or set up shields to protect themselves from this feedback, not realizing the potential it had for system improvement or giving their “clients” the opportunity to act with and not merely be acted on. This feedback can be very useful in evalu-
ating the operation or goal achievement of the system, particularly a social system such as a government agency. Feedback/input operates to allow the community or service clients to impact the operation and goal setting of the government agency, creating what the authors of the national best-selling book *Reinventing Government* called “Community-Owned Government” (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993). As an example of community-owned government, Osborne and Gaebler cite the efforts of Lee Brown when he became police chief of Houston, Texas, in 1982 (50). In setting up “neighborhood-oriented policing,” Brown believed that the police should do more than respond to incidents of crime by also helping neighborhoods solve problems that create crime and crime conditions. The police, particularly beat officers, solicited input from neighborhood residents because Brown recognized that police officers are the boundary spanners between the police department as a system and the community as the external environment. Good police-community relationships demand that feedback from the community is constantly solicited and evaluated by the police. Efforts to solicit feedback, to name a few, come in the form of community surveys, customer follow-ups (contacting and surveying those who have requested the police), customer contacts (beat patrol), customer councils (regularly scheduled community meetings), focus groups, involvement in police activities (ride-alongs and citizen academies), and complaint tracking systems. As cited in the book, many police agencies are involved in these activities.
Chapter 1

The police must also solicit and involve themselves in providing feedback/input to other systems. Police agencies are a part of several systems and are also a system within a system. They are part of the criminal justice, the human services delivery, and the community social systems. Each person in the police agency is part of a family system and of the police agency system. Police agencies and police officers are affected by systems principles in all of these contexts. They help to shape the systems in which they participate, and they are shaped by them. Each of these systems is, in effect, a community with which the police must relate. Community is defined as a group of people sharing common boundaries, such as common goals, needs, interests, and/or geographical location. The task of police-community relations appears more complex as each community is considered.

THE MANY COMMUNITIES IN COMMUNITY RELATIONS

In future chapters, each of these communities, and others, will receive individual attention. At this point, however, it is important to recognize a few of the many communities that make up the environment in which police work. Each has a distinct identity of its own; each has its own elements and each interacts in some distinct way with police and with each other. Each community must be part of police-community relations if it is to be truly effective.

External Communities

The Justice Community

Other police agencies, jurisdictions, courts, and corrections departments existing at many levels of government are part of the justice community with which police must interact. The nature of the relationship between police and members of the justice community has a direct impact on police effectiveness in achieving goals. A lack of coordination, communication, and mutual respect within this community, or system, is legendary. Community relations includes relations with this community as a whole and with its individual members.

The Political Community

As we stated, the early police reformers worked to extricate the police from domination by political bosses and their partisan politics. It is proper that partisan politics, in the form of interference in police personnel decisions and enforcement decisions, be eliminated. However, the police can never divorce themselves completely from politics and elected officials. Our current system of decentralized policing ensures that police departments “are closely tied to political and community interests, and that they be held politically accountable for their actions” (Cordner and Sheehan, 1999, p. 119). The political community—in the form of elected officials—is one of the ways that democratic societies keep police power in check.
The political community also provides funding and other resources. Many police executives have failed to recognize the importance of the political community to their, and their agencies’, success. The legendary battle between Los Angeles P.D. Chief Daryl Gates and Mayor Bradley is well known (Gates, 1992).

**The Human Services Community**

The human services umbrella includes many public and private social service resources; mental health and general medical services; media, civic, and religious groups; and educational services. These also form a community, and sometimes multiple communities with which police officers and agencies interact. Mutual support and availability of services may be lacking because of poor police-community relations. Keeping the peace may depend upon access to and coordination of such resources.

**Citizens and the Police**

Peel’s principles state that (Critchley, 1967; Reith, 1952) “the police must secure the willing cooperation of the public in voluntary observance of the law to be able to secure and maintain public respect.” Part of police-community relations is understanding the public that police serve and having the public understand police. That is no easy task. The public is many people, with many varying needs and hopes, who live in a changing society and bring to that society conflicting values and cultural rules. The police agency is relatively closed, somewhat secretive, and vague as to what the police role and the citizen role should be. Citizen participation in policing, particularly in crime prevention aspects, has increased in recent years. The business community actively participates in police-designed crime prevention programs. Neighborhoods operate effective block watches. Many of these efforts are models in cost-effective crime prevention. Citizen volunteers now participate in many areas of police work. Even those efforts that have been focused on little more than public relations could be redefined and expanded in the context of community relations.

Thus far, however, much of this redefinition and expansion is rhetorical rather than practiced, and those communities and neighborhoods most in need of improved police-community relationships are the ones least likely to be involved in such projects. The cooperation and support of other groups are much easier to gain and maintain.

**Internal Communities**

**The Personal Support Community**

The officers’ support groups, both in the sense of a family system and close personal relationships, affect the officers’ perspective and effectiveness. Each officer has an impact on the support groups as well. This relationship may be one of the
most critical in determining an officer’s ability to cope with the human experience of being a cop. It may also determine to a large degree how the individual officer will relate with other communities.

**The Police Community**

The police officer must also be considered as a member of the police agency and police structure. It is this community that can determine whether police-community relations outside the agency will be supported or undermined both as a matter of policy and practice. The first positive relationship that must be formed is effective community relations in a larger sense is to be accomplished is within the agency itself (Fischer, 1981, pp. 54–55).

**Conclusions**

Police-community relations programs were built on the foundations of *already existing public relations programs* and, like those programs, involved working with the community in ways that leave little or no room for recommending or effecting changes in departmental policies or procedures. In other words, there was no allowance for essential feedback.

Police-community work concentrated on precisely the segments of the community (e.g., blacks, lower-class youth, and poor) that were most neglected by the earlier public-relations approach, a change that called for new attitudes and procedures.

Police-community relations (following a familiar tendency of our age and bureaucracies everywhere) have become a specialized function to be carried out by special units.

Programs were begun in the 1970s because it was apparent that some response to injustice, discrimination, and poverty was needed, but the response was rarely the result of careful analysis and planning.

Police-community relations work to date has revealed the isolation of the police in society, particularly their isolation from what is going on in ghettos, universities, hospitals, union halls, various government agencies, and, most important, other institutions of the criminal justice system.

If police wish to maintain ongoing dialogues with all members of society, community relations must be a part of every officer’s job and the department’s mission.

A police agency is part of several systems and is also a system within a system. Each of these systems is, in effect, a community with which the police must relate. These include the justice community, the political community, the human services community, the personal support community, the system within a system, and citizens and the police. The task of police-community relations appears increasingly complex as each community is considered. However, understanding the concept of police-community relations, the people who are involved in its processes, the systems in which they function, the problems they encounter, and the successes they achieve provides a basis for improving police-community relationships in all communities.
**STUDENT CHECKLIST**

1. Describe the different views of communities utilized within “traditional” police-community relations and “contemporary” police-community relations.
2. What are police-community relations as described in this chapter?
3. Define the people’s police and community.
4. Describe briefly the impact of police-community relations on the police system.
5. Why is feedback necessary for effective police-community relations?
6. Describe briefly the evolution of police-community relations programs in the United States.
7. List some of the difficulties surrounding a new police-community relations program.
8. Identify several “communities” within which the police play important roles.

**TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Describe some of the difficulties that might be encountered by a new police-community relations program in your community.
2. How can police, psychiatrists, social workers, and teachers be mutually helpful and yet not intrude into each other’s professions?
3. Discuss the merit of formal meetings between police administrators and presiding judges, and compare this with the need to change attitudes in these areas of the criminal justice system.
4. Demonstrate that a police-community relations program is a process, not a product.
5. Discuss how overlapping memberships in various internal and external communities could facilitate both conflict and cooperation.

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**One Step Forward**

**Law Enforcement Code of Ethics**

All law enforcement officers must be fully aware of the ethical responsibilities of their positions and must strive constantly to live up to the highest possible standards of professional policing.

(continued)
The International Association of Chiefs of Police believes it is important that police officers have clear advice and counsel available to assist them in performing their duties consistent with these standards, and has adopted the following ethical mandates as guidelines to meet these ends.

**Primary Responsibilities of a Police Officer**

A police officer acts as an official representative of government who is required and trusted to work within the law. The officer’s powers and duties are conferred by statute. The fundamental duties of a police officer include serving the community; safeguarding lives and property; protecting the innocent; keeping the peace; and ensuring the rights of all to liberty, equality, and justice.

**Performance of the Duties of a Police Officer**

A police officer shall perform all duties impartially, without favor or affection or ill will and without regard to status, sex, race, religion, political belief, or aspiration. All citizens will be treated equally with courtesy, consideration, and dignity. Officers will never allow personal feelings, animosities, or friendships influence official conduct. Laws will be enforced appropriately and courteously and, in carrying out their responsibilities, officers will strive to obtain maximum cooperation from the public. They will conduct themselves in appearance and deportment in such a manner as to inspire confidence and respect for the position of public trust they hold.

**Discretion**

A police officer will use responsibly the discretion vested in the position and exercise it within the law. The principle of reasonableness will guide the officer’s determinations and the officer will consider all surrounding circumstances in determining whether any legal action shall be taken.

Consistent and wise use of discretion, based on professional policing competence, will do much to preserve good relationships and retain the confidence of the public. There can be difficulty in choosing between conflicting courses of action. It is important to remember that a timely word of advice rather than arrest—which may be correct in appropriate circumstances—can be a more effective means of achieving a desired end.

**Use of Force**

A police officer will never employ unnecessary force or violence and will use only such force in the discharge of duty as is reasonable in all circumstances.
Force should be used only with the greatest restraint and only after discussion, negotiation, and persuasion have been found to be inappropriate or ineffective. While the use of force is occasionally unavoidable, every police officer will refrain from applying the unnecessary infliction of pain or suffering and will never engage in cruel, degrading, or inhuman treatment of any person.

Confidentiality

Whatever a police officer sees, hears, or learns of, which is of a confidential nature, will be kept secret unless the performance of duty or legal provision requires otherwise.

Members of the public have a right to security and privacy, and information obtained about them must not be improperly divulged.

Integrity

A police officer will not engage in acts of corruption or bribery, nor will an officer condone such acts by other police officers.

The public demands that the integrity of police officers be above reproach. Police officers must, therefore, avoid any conduct that might compromise integrity and thus undercut the public confidence in a law enforcement agency. Officers will refuse to accept any gifts, presents, subscriptions, favors, gratuities, or promises that could be interpreted as seeking to cause the officer to refrain from performing official responsibilities honestly and within the law. Police officers must not receive private or special advantage from their official status. Respect from the public cannot be bought; it can only be earned and cultivated.

Cooperation with Other Officers and Agencies

Police officers will cooperate with all legally authorized agencies and their representatives in the pursuit of justice.

An officer or agency may be one among many organizations that may provide law enforcement services to a jurisdiction. It is imperative that a police officer assist colleagues fully and completely with respect and consideration at all times.

Personal/Professional Capabilities

Police officers will be responsible for their own standard of professional performance and will take every reasonable opportunity to enhance and improve their level of knowledge and competence.
Through study and experience, a police officer can acquire the high level of knowledge and competence that is essential for the efficient and effective performance of duty. The acquisition of knowledge is a never-ending process of personal and professional development that should be pursued constantly.

**Private Life**

Police officers will behave in a manner that does not bring discredit to their agencies or themselves.

A police officer’s character and conduct while off duty must always be exemplary, thus maintaining a position of respect in the community in which he or she lives and serves. The officer’s personal behavior must be beyond reproach.

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*Source:* International Association of Chiefs of Police, Gaithersburg, Maryland.

### Bibliography


