The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing produced a final report in May 2015. This Training Key serves as an overview of the final report developed by the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

Every officer must be aware of the segments that exist within their community and the most effective way to serve them. Officers must also be aware of the technologies available to them, and how to best use those in the course of their duties. Additionally, officers must be aware of the changing social climate that exists globally and how those changes affect local policing. These are only a few aspects that must be considered by officers across the United States. This Training Key®, and all subsequent training and resource documents produced by IACP on this topic, take into account this new reality for policing and what it means for the day-to-day operations of law enforcement officers.

Background on the Task Force Report

On December 18, 2014, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13684, which established the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. The task force was designed to “identify the best means to provide an effective partnership between law enforcement and local communities that reduces crime and increases trust.” The Executive Order came in the wake of high-profile incidents involving law enforcement interactions with other members of the community.

The task force consisted of 11 individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement, civil rights, academia, and law. There were seven public listening sessions held over the course of three months during which subject matter experts and community members were invited to testify. In addition, numerous other individuals and organizations submitted written testimony.
The task force’s final report consists of 59 recommendations, with an additional 5 recommendations for federal agencies. Many of the recommendations come with supporting action items. These recommendations span from policy and training decisions to officer safety and wellness practices.

The task force report’s recommendations and corresponding action items have major implications for law enforcement leaders at all levels. While the report calls for an examination of the broader social issues affecting America, as well as a deeper dive into the processes of the entire criminal justice system, the report also gives guidance directly to law enforcement agencies and the individuals that protect and serve communities all over the country.

Many of the concepts contained in the task force report are not new. Some date back to the first age of modern policing in the 1800s; other concepts are more recent; and some, like community policing, are evolving to meet the challenges of the modern world. The goal of the IACP is to assist agencies in operationalizing these recommendations and to provide concrete ways in which officers can bring the concepts of policing in the 21st century to life in a positive and effective way.

**Task Force Report Focus Areas**

The task force identified six focus areas, or pillars. These pillars cover the major aspects of policing and range from community policing to technology to officer safety. A brief overview of each pillar is provided in this document, and a more in-depth discussion of the pillars will be available in subsequent Training Keys.

**Pillar One: Building Trust and Legitimacy.** The first pillar provides the basis for the other five pillars by establishing foundational principles that are carried through the report. The themes of transparency, accountability, and legitimacy are explored throughout the introductory discussion and recommendations in the first pillar. Procedural justice, bias, and the guardian mind-set are major components of this discussion.

Procedural justice is introduced in this pillar. Procedural justice is the idea that individuals judge the fairness of the overall system on how fair they perceive the process as opposed to how fair they perceive the outcome. Procedural justice is directly tied to the other themes of legitimacy, transparency, and accountability and can be viewed from both an external perspective (individuals outside the agency) and internal perspective (officers and staff).

Bias is another theme that is explored in this pillar. Understanding the types of bias that exist, how those types of bias affect actions, and what can be done to mitigate certain types of bias are crucial to effective policing. In order to gain this understanding, bias will need to become a topic of conversation.

The guardian mind-set represents a shift in attitude from that of a warrior to that of a guardian. As policing priorities have changed throughout the years, some argue an emphasis has been placed on the militarization of the police through tactics, equipment, and culture. A shift is needed to move from this warrior mind-set to a guardian mind-set. As Susan Rahr wrote, “Guardians are members of the community, protecting from within.”

**Pillar Two: Policy and Oversight.** Pillar Two builds upon the ideas established in Pillar One and begins to focus on the role of the community. This sections outlines particular policy areas that should be addressed by agencies. However, the report notes that having these policies is not enough. Policies must reflect community values in order to enhance trust and legitimacy.

The role of the community is discussed throughout the report, and this pillar focuses on the idea of community oversight. Community oversight of an agency can exist in many forms and is being implemented in jurisdictions throughout the United States in numerous ways. These forms of community involvement allow for different levels of input by external stakeholders and can be a valuable tool for agencies. There is no one-size-fits-all form of community involvement, so all agencies should assess this idea to determine what will work best for their community.

Another component discussed in this pillar is that of peer review processes. Nonpunitive peer review systems can provide officers a mechanism for learning from each other and improving their responses to situations. This type of process can also create feedback that may result in improved underlying processes and procedures, more effective officers, as well as increased safety and wellness.

**Pillar Three: Technology and Social Media.** Pillar Three examines law enforcement technologies, such as body-worn cameras, unmanned aircraft, and less-lethal weapons, as well as the topic of social media. While these technologies cover a broad range of products and uses, many of the considerations for law enforcement agencies are similar.

When considering the deployment of technology, it is important that agencies take into consideration proper and effective use as well as the privacy and civil liberty concerns of the community. The IACP Technology Policy Framework outlines nine universal principles that guide technology policy in law enforcement agencies. These principles are specification of use; policies and procedures; privacy and data quality; data minimization and limitation; performance evaluation; transparency and notice; security; data retention, access, and use; and auditing and accountability. These principles apply to all forms of technology. Social media is also a theme in Pillar Three. Social media is a form of technology that allows users to generate and share content and gives users opportunities to connect, interact, and collaborate. While social media can be used by law enforcement for many purposes, the main focus in the task force report is the role it can and does play in community policing. Bill Schrier gave the following advice in his testimony to the task force, “Regularly refresh the content to maintain and engage the audience. Be responsive and quick. Post content...
rapidly during incidents to dispel rumors... Use social media for engagement, not just public information.”

As with all other forms of technology, social media must be implemented mindfully with accompanying policy and strategy. With the proper process, technology can assist agencies in increasing their ability to serve and protect communities in a safe, just, and fair manner.

**Pillar Four: Community Policing and Crime Reduction.** The fourth pillar examines community policing and crime reduction techniques and their effect on community members. Community policing should evolve to meet the new expectations that emerge as a result of the efforts outlined in the previous pillars. Instead of assigning a particular unit or individual to focus on community-related tasks, community policing should become an overall philosophy that permeates all levels and roles in a law enforcement agency.

In addition to enforcement duties, this pillar examines the role law enforcement officers play in intervention and prevention and how that relates to crime reduction. Relationship and partnership building can and should be part of an officer’s everyday duties. In addition to traditional crime reduction strategies, officers should find and create opportunities for non-enforcement interactions that will help enhance community policing efforts.

Interactions with youth is also a theme in Pillar Four. This area calls for partnerships among law enforcement agencies, school systems, and social services in addressing youth issues. Officers may work with their agencies and stakeholders to find the best solutions and determine the proper role law enforcement should play when disciplinary issues among youth arise.

**Pillar Five: Training and Education.** Pillar Five focuses on hiring, training, and continuing education for law enforcement officers. The report outlines the need for increased training with an emphasis on particular topics such as problem solving and decision making, crisis intervention, cultural responsiveness, and procedural justice. In addition to training topics, the task force discussed underlying issues that should be included in order for officers to be even more effective. For example, understanding historical perspectives, character traits, and themes such as procedural justice will enhance an officer’s training.

Again, this pillar examines the involvement of community members who are not part of the law enforcement agency. Educating the community on how and why officers are trained a certain way can increase transparency and legitimacy. In addition, training may be provided to those outside of the agency so they can better understand police operations.

Another aspect of this pillar is the attitude of career-long learning. Training academies should provide a strong foundation for officers; however, education should not stop there. Not only should training on practices and tactics be continued throughout an officer’s career, but it should also be supplemented by leadership training.

**Pillar Six: Officer Wellness and Safety.** The final pillar focuses on all aspects of officer safety and physical and mental health. “An officer whose capabilities, judgment, and behavior are adversely affected by poor physical or psychological health not only may be of little use to the community he or she serves but also may be a danger to the community and to other officers.”

Issues such as physical fitness, bulletproof vest and seat belt wear, and mental health are all part of the larger discussion of officer safety and wellness.

Mental health is a large component of the safety and wellness discussion for law enforcement officers. The issue of officer suicide is highlighted as a major problem that needs to be addressed not only at the federal level, but also at the local level within departments.

Instilling a culture of safety and wellness starts with communication. Leaders at all levels of the organization must make safety and wellness a priority and be willing to begin and maintain conversations surrounding issues of safety and wellness.

**Overarching Themes**

**Procedural Justice.** Procedural justice is a term that is used numerous times throughout the task force report and is a foundational aspect of 21st century policing.

As was discussed under Pillar One, procedural justice is the idea that individuals judge the fairness of the system on how they perceive the process as opposed to how they perceive the outcome. This is then tied directly to the legitimacy of a law enforcement agency in their community.

Internal procedural justice refers to how officers and staff perceive the fairness of the processes, procedures, and policies in their own organization. While external accountability and legitimacy are incredibly important, communication and transparency within an agency are equally essential. Officers should understand the policies and practices that exist as well as why they exist and the role they play in the larger picture of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Providing officers with adequate training as well as opportunities to have input in policy making and procedure development can help instill a culture of procedural justice.

Procedural justice, both internal and external, will continue to be a major theme in policing in the years to come. Therefore, an understanding of procedural justice, how it relates to policing, and how it impacts a particular agency and community is necessary. The following themes of partnerships, culture, and communication, play a role in how procedural justice is adopted within an agency.

**Partnerships.** Partnerships have been a key component of community policing since its inception, so it is not surprising that a focus on partnerships runs throughout the report. Partnerships may take a formalized structure, but can, and should be a regular part of informal interactions with individuals and groups throughout the community.

There are many potential partners within a community. Below are just a few considerations.
• **Community members and leaders.** Leaders exist throughout the community in both formal and informal roles. These leaders know their constituency and can serve as gatekeepers to segments of the community. Partnerships with key leaders and community members can assist law enforcement officers when they need to share a message or gain information from individuals throughout the jurisdiction.

• **Other Agencies and Organizations.** Law enforcement officers are called to deal with an increasing number of situations. Knowing organizations that are familiar with specific subjects, such as mental health professionals, youth organizations, and homeless support providers, can be key to positive outcomes.

• **Educational Institutions.** Schools within a jurisdiction provide a great opportunity for many types of partnerships. School officials such as board members, principals, teachers, and other staff have direct access to and often understand the unique needs of youth. They are therefore a vital partner when dealing with youth issues. The students themselves are also potential partners and can provide valuable insight into programs and operations. Higher education institutions such as colleges and universities can also serve as a partner by providing research expertise. Professors and other researchers in these institutions may be able to provide assistance with the administration of surveys, collection of data, and analysis and reporting of findings.

• **Businesses.** Businesses have access to expertise and resources that can support operations and services of the law enforcement agency. Business owners have a strong investment in the community and therefore may be willing to provide input and have key insight into improving relationships and practices.

Involving external stakeholders gives expanded perspective on many issues. Providing individuals from outside the agency with a seat at the table and a voice on the important issues that are affecting them will enhance transparency and, in turn, legitimacy and procedural justice.

These partnerships require everyone from the frontline patrol officer to the chief executive to know the community and actively participate in relationship-building activities. Opportunities for relationship building exist in many forms. Below are three examples, but many more exist and may be unique to a given community or jurisdiction.

• **Informal interactions.** Officers interact with people every day during the normal course of their duties. Each interaction is an opportunity to build a relationship. Officers can create non-enforcement related contacts with individuals and groups that have nothing to do with investigations or arrests. These interactions present a great opportunity for getting to know those that live, work, and visit the community.

• **Community forums.** Hosting formal meetings can also be a way to include input from the community and build relationships. Formal meetings can take the form of open community forums or smaller meetings with specific individuals or groups. Officers and other law enforcement leaders may also look for opportunities to join in existing community meetings such as parent-teacher group meetings, faith-based organizational gatherings, or classes held at educational institutions.

• **Virtual community building.** While in-person interactions and partnership creation are invaluable, technology and social media tools provide yet another platform for relationship building. Through effective social media use, agencies can share information quickly to a large audience. Social media also allows for interaction that can be used to dispel rumors, explain processes and practices, and engage in positive two-way communication.

There are endless opportunities for partnership in all jurisdictions. It is vital that all officers from new recruits to chief executives understand the role they play in identifying, building, and maintaining these relationships.

**Culture.** Organizational culture is a powerful thing. Culture will always trump policy, strategy, or any other guidance put forth by an agency. Because of this, it is imperative that officers at all levels understand culture and are able to identify aspects of their own agency’s culture that are positive and those that need improvement.

Culture is engrained, which means it is not quick or easy to change. If there is a need to change a particular aspect of culture within an agency, it will take patience and perseverance on the part of all leaders in the organization to effect this change.

Culture plays a role in how many of the issues discussed in the task force report are received by the law enforcement profession as a whole and within an agency. For example, the mind-set shift from warrior to guardian requires a cultural shift as well. In addition, issues such as mental health awareness require an open culture where difficult discussions can be made. The ideas of transparency, accountability, and procedural justice, in order to be fully realized in a community, must be woven into the law enforcement agency’s culture.

Leadership plays a key role in building and sustaining organizational culture. This includes both formal and informal leaders at all levels of the agency. Leaders should be cultivated throughout their careers and given the tools and direction needed to assist in creating and maintaining appropriate organizational culture.

**Communication.** In order to deal with any and all of the themes previously described, to include procedural justice, partnerships, and culture, there must be open channels of communication. This applies both internally, among officers and supervisors, as well as externally, between agency representatives and the community.
There are many aspects of communication that should be considered during all interactions, especially with those who are not in the law enforcement profession.

- **Know the audience.** Identifying the audience for a specific message will help tailor the language and tone used so it will be received in the best way possible. Knowing and understanding the audience will also help in determining the best forum for delivering the message.

- **Keep language simple and clear.** Many people who do not operate in the law enforcement field on a daily basis do not have an understanding of police procedures, tactics, and processes. Therefore, it is incredibly important to avoid using jargon and highly technical terms when speaking to those outside the agency.

- **Use words to build, not divide.** Think about how the dialogue is framed and conducted. Using terms such as “us” and “them” can increase the gap that will need to be bridged. Keep in mind that the officers are part of the community just as much as other individuals who live and work in the jurisdiction.

- **Be aware of the nonverbal.** Nonverbal communication, including body language, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact, can convey just as much information as what an individual says verbally. The manner in which one speaks is also considered nonverbal and can play a large role in how communication is received. This includes aspects such as pitch, volume, and tone.

The themes addressed in the report, from policy and oversight to officer wellness, are not reserved for conversations held in board rooms and executive offices, but should also be taking place in cruisers, roll call rooms, and in neighborhoods everywhere. Many of these conversations may be difficult and even uncomfortable, such as those surrounding bias, community interactions, and mental health. However, this difficulty means it is even more important to begin discussions immediately with colleagues, subject matter experts, and stakeholders in the community.

**Putting It Together**

So what does all this mean for the 21st century officer?

Law enforcement has entered a new era of policing, which will require a new mind-set around policy, operations, and culture. The *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing* has set forth recommendations that encompass many areas and themes of the modern law enforcement climate.

Officers at all levels will need to be prepared for this new reality. Officers should do the following:

- Understand the themes of transparency, legitimacy, and procedural justice
- Form and maintain partnerships with individuals and groups throughout the community
- Have conversations with each other and with the community

**Conclusion**

While many of the ideas and themes set forth in the *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing* are not new, some of the recommendations may be unclear, uncomfortable, or even difficult for some to operationalize. However, the IACP and other organizations are working hard to support agencies and officers as they grow and adapt to this new environment.

More specific guidance for operationalizing the recommendations found in the *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing* can be found in the subsequent three *Training Keys®*.

**Acknowledgment**

This *Training Key®* was developed by Rebecca M. Stickley as part of the International Association of Chiefs of Police Institute for Community-Police Relations.

**Endnotes**

7. Recommendations to the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Listening Session on Technology and Social Media: Technology Policy (January 31, 2015) (oral testimony of Bill Schrier, Chair, Washington State Interoperability Executive Committee and State Point of Contact, First Responder Network Authority).
questions

The following questions are based on material in this Training Key®. Select the one best answer for each question.

1. The Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing covers what aspects of policing?
   (a) Officer safety and wellness
   (b) Existing and emerging technologies
   (c) Policy and oversight
   (d) All of the above

2. Procedural justice refers to
   (a) any issues or situations that involve the United States legal system.
   (b) the idea that individuals judge the fairness of the justice system on how fair they perceive the process as opposed to how fair they perceive the outcome.
   (c) justice that is administered in accordance with all laws and customs of a particular jurisdiction.

3. Nonverbal communication consists of
   (a) speech volume.
   (b) posture.
   (c) hand gestures.
   (d) all of the above.

answers

1. (d)
2. (b)
3. (d)