PRACTICES IN MODERN POLICING

POLICING IN SMALL, RURAL, AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES
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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the COPS Office, in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and CNA, launched the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative. This program provides evaluations and technical support to 15 law enforcement agencies. Because these agencies are diverse in size, location, and other characteristics, their insights and lessons learned can be useful to other agencies across the nation. Their program efforts are published as part of the Practices in Modern Policing series. These reports offer guidance to the field for advancing practices and policies in specific aspects of community policing.

This publication focuses on small, rural, and tribal communities, with case studies of the Kewaunee County (Wisconsin) Sheriff’s Department, the South Dakota Highway Patrol, and the Gun Lake Tribe in Michigan.

Big cities have more of everything than small, rural, and tribal communities: more people, traffic, transit, shopping, parks, and schools. Big cities also have more violent crime. However, crime rates alone do not determine the need for law enforcement, nor do they dictate the nature of it: for example, high crime rates related to graffiti don’t mean a city is unsafe. Despite having lower crime rates, small, rural, and tribal communities have their own public safety needs, the responsibility for which belongs to law enforcement agencies whose location, size, and composition create unique challenges and opportunities unlike those in large metropolitan areas.

Community-oriented policing can help small, rural, and tribal law enforcement agencies overcome those challenges through partnerships, problem solving, and creative organizational design. With examples and case studies, this guide illustrates how such agencies can leverage their distinctive strengths in order to build communities that are healthy, safe, and productive.

Sizing up law enforcement in small, rural, tribal communities

Statistics show that big cities are bigger than they’ve ever been—and are only going to get bigger. In 1910, for instance, more than half of the U.S. population (54.4 percent) lived in rural areas; more than a century later, just one in five Americans (19.3 percent) does.

Due to the growth in major cities, larger law enforcement agencies often get the most attention, but it is the smaller agencies that make up the bulk of policing in the United States. In 2013, nearly half of all local law enforcement agencies (48 percent) in the United States had fewer than 10 officers, and

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three-quarters (75 percent) had fewer than 25 officers. Likewise, nearly three-quarters of local police departments (71 percent) and nearly one-quarter of sheriffs’ offices (21 percent) served communities with fewer than 10,000 residents.

Despite their shared mission, it is important to acknowledge that small, rural, and tribal law enforcement agencies differ from large metro areas in significant ways. The need for public safety is identical in rural and urban areas, but the law enforcement strategies that resonate often are not.

The final report from the Task Force on 21st Century Policing notes that “most of the policies, programs, and practices recommended by the task force can and should be implemented at the local level. It is understood, however, that there are no ‘one size fits all’ solutions and that implementation will vary according to agency size, location, resources, and other factors.”

Indeed, community policing in small, rural, and tribal communities demands special consideration of those communities’ unique challenges and inherent opportunities.

**Unique challenges**

Although they typically serve fewer people than urban police departments, small, rural, and tribal law enforcement agencies perform the same core functions: “law enforcement, crime prevention, traffic control, protection of civil rights and liberties, solving crimes, and preventing terrorism.” But because small size means not only fewer resources, but often fewer officers per capita, small, rural, and tribal agencies often have to do more with less.

This challenge is especially evident in the areas of technology and training, according to the task force: “Small forces often lack the resources for training and equipment accessible to larger departments and often are prevented by municipal boundaries and local custom from combining forces with neighboring agencies.” Indeed, new tools like body cameras, dashboard cameras, and electro-muscular disruption technology remain out of reach for many smaller law enforcement agencies, even as they become ubiquitous in larger ones.

“Access to new technologies can be challenging for small agencies because they may lack the necessary resources to purchase new equipment, the technical background and training to assess product options, and the means to thoroughly explain technology needs to city officials;” the IACP’s Smaller Agency Training and
Technical Assistance Project concluded in its 2015 focus group report. Likewise with training and education: “The biggest issue smaller agencies encounter with training is manpower and the ability to backfill an officer’s position. When an officer is attending a training, another colleague must cover their shift in order to have appropriate staffing in the office or on patrol. This may involve a shortage of staff or incurring overtime costs.”

Another obstacle for small, rural, and tribal agencies is geography: Unlike their budgets, smaller agencies’ footprints often are extremely large, which can change the traditional notion of “community.” State police agencies, for example, by design have jurisdiction over large and remote expanses of land. “State police cover such vast geographic areas that their reliance on automobiles. . . .is nearly inevitable. Foot patrol and bicycle patrol, visible hallmarks of local-level community policing, are simply not practical for most state policing,” writes former Kutztown University Criminal Justice Professor Gary Cordner, Ph.D.

For small, rural, and tribal agencies, the limitations imposed by their size and geography also have implications for their officers’ health and safety. Limited staffing, for instance, means that officers often patrol alone and with the potential for lengthy wait times for backup. Meanwhile, small and rural communities’ limited infrastructure and economies mean officers may lack access to gyms where they can exercise, markets and restaurants where they can consume nutritious food, and health care facilities where they can seek physical and mental health services.

To these, as former rural patrol deputy Lance Eldridge observes, add the difficulties imposed by the social environment: “encountering friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors at crime scenes as victims, suspects, and witnesses; limited peer interaction; comparatively lower pay than their urban counterparts; [and] longer periods of inactivity.”

Finally, all of these problems further complicate what Police Chief Tracey McCoy of Lochbuie, Colorado, calls “the single most important issue facing all police departments:” hiring and retaining good officers.

“Small departments are. . . faced with not being able to provide the salary and benefits offered by larger departments and there is not as much room for advancement or specialized duties in a small department,” McCoy observes. “Combine that with the fact that many people who are interested in becoming a police officer have grandiose ideas of working in the city and that being a police officer is like what they saw on television growing up. Given these factors, it should come as no surprise that a majority of candidates are applying for positions with larger agencies.”

11. Emerging Trends and Issues in Smaller Law Enforcement Agencies, 6 (see note 10).
Inherent opportunities

The same attributes that create challenges for law enforcement in small, rural, and tribal communities also create advantages, which law enforcement agencies can leverage to make community policing at once more feasible and more effective.

“There are... distinct advantages in working in a smaller, rural department,” Eldridge says. “With fewer calls for service officers have time to act on crime prevention and more thoroughly investigate the crimes that do occur. Though officers probably respond to more than their fair share of barking dog and civil complaints, these contacts allow them to hone interpersonal skills and develop relationships that may prove useful in the future. Though the number of vice investigators/detectives is not readily available, it would be safe to conclude that in many smaller jurisdictions patrol officers perform, from time to time, investigative duties that look more like detective work.”

Indeed, officers who work for small, rural, and tribal police departments often have the opportunity to take on duties and responsibilities they otherwise wouldn’t—including higher-level work that would be done by special units in larger agencies; activities that complement their personal interests, like sports-related community events; and other duties that have a direct and immediate impact on their agency or community.

“One benefit smaller departments have is the ability to more easily engage staff and give them a voice in day-to-day operations and future planning,” observes the IACP, which notes officers in small, rural, and tribal agencies may have the chance to offer ideas for future expenditures during budget planning, comment on general order changes before they are finalized, contribute to a suggestion box, engage with the chief during open-door office hours, and receive regular debriefings on how things are going and what can be done differently. “These strategies can make officers feel like valued team players and encourage retention.”

The shorter chain of command at small, rural, and tribal agencies means officers can positively impact not only policies, but also people— which is why many officers pursue careers in law enforcement to begin with. “Smaller agencies have the advantage of being able to interact with community members on a more personal level than some larger agencies,” the IACP report continues. “Beyond calls for service, smaller agency officers can take more time to assess and respond to the needs of the community. Smaller agency chiefs can engage and talk to local businesses and connect at a grassroots level[,] making it easier to form community partnerships that may result in support and even funding for community programs.”

15. Eldridge, “Policing Mayberry” (see note 13).
16. Emerging Trends and Issues in Smaller Law Enforcement Agencies, 8 (see note 10).
17. Emerging Trends and Issues in Smaller Law Enforcement Agencies, 8–9 (see note 10).
To the benefit of law enforcement, those relationships also extend to local media and community advocates. “In light of recent events that have garnered national news coverage... a negative narrative against law enforcement is growing,” the report concludes. “On the positive side, smaller agencies are often able to control the message in their community more easily than large agencies. Smaller agencies can cultivate more personal relationships with the media, community leaders, and public.”

**Policing in small, rural, and tribal communities: Recommendations from the task force report**

The final task force report concluded that, “Law enforcement culture should embrace a guardian—rather than a warrior—mindset to build trust and legitimacy both within agencies and with the public.” Furthermore, it suggested that law enforcement agencies should conduct themselves in ways that “reflect community values,” endeavor to reduce crime by “improving relationships, increasing community engagement, and fostering cooperation,” ensure officers and leaders are “trained and capable to address a wide variety of challenges,” and “promote wellness and safety at every level of the organization.”

Achieving these objectives in small, rural, and tribal communities requires law enforcement to develop strategic approaches to policing that exploit those communities’ innate strengths and compensate for their intrinsic weaknesses. The following action items recommended by the task force may be able to help them do so.

The federal government should do the following:

- Develop survey tools and instructions for using them, to prevent local departments from incurring the expense and to promote consistency across jurisdictions.
- Create a Law Enforcement Diversity Initiative that helps communities diversify law enforcement departments to reflect their demographics by creating best practices for recruitment, training, and outreach.
- Highlight and celebrate law enforcement agencies that embrace diversity while offering technical assistance to facilitate change at law enforcement agencies that don’t.
- Make discretionary federal funding for law enforcement programs subject to departments’ efforts to improve their diversity and their cultural and linguistic responsiveness.
- Incentivize collaboration between law enforcement agencies and community members through a variety of programs that focus on public health, education, mental health, and other programs not traditionally part of the criminal justice system.

18. Emerging Trends and Issues in Smaller Law Enforcement Agencies, 4 (see note 10).
19. Final Report of the President’s Task Force (see note 7).
• Incentivize universities and other organizations to partner with police departments to collect data and develop knowledge about analysis and benchmarks, as well as to develop tools and templates that help departments manage data collection and analysis.

• Invest via the U.S. Department of Justice in developing learning goals and model curricula and training for each level of leadership.

Law enforcement agencies should do the following:

• Embrace a culture of transparency by making all department policies available for public review and regularly posting on the department’s website information about stops, summonses, arrests, reported crime, and other law enforcement data aggregated by demographics.

• Communicate with citizens and the media swiftly, openly, and neutrally—respecting areas where the law requires confidentiality—whenever serious incidents occur, including those involving alleged police misconduct.

• Pursue external legitimacy by involving the community in the process of developing and evaluating policies and procedures.

• Include an evaluation or assessment process to gauge the effectiveness of any new technology, soliciting input from all levels of the agency, from line officers to leadership, as well as assessment from community members.

• Place an increased value on developing partnerships by evaluating officers on their efforts to engage members of the community and the partnerships they build.

• Evaluate patrol deployment practices to allow sufficient time for patrol officers to participate in problem solving and community engagement activities.

• Develop programs that create opportunities for patrol officers to regularly interact with neighborhood residents, faith leaders, and business leaders.

• Schedule regular forums and meetings where community members can interact with police and help influence programs and policy.

• Establish formal community/citizen advisory committees to assist in developing crime prevention strategies and agency policies, as well as to provide input on policing issues.

• Adopt community policing strategies that support and work in concert with economic development efforts within communities.

• Keep youth in school and away from criminal and violent behavior by working with schools and youth to encourage the creation of alternatives to student suspensions and expulsion through restorative justice, diversion, counseling, and family interventions.

• Implement ongoing, top-down training for all officers in cultural diversity and related topics, in order to help build trust and police legitimacy in diverse communities.
PROMISING PROGRAMS FOR SMALL, RURAL, AND TRIBAL POLICING

Law enforcement agencies around the country have developed many successful programs through which to implement community-policing practices. Small, rural, and tribal police departments have adapted and created their own community policing strategies that address their communities’ unique challenges and opportunities. Among the 15 model sites for the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative, three are small, rural, or tribal agencies. Their efforts demonstrate that community policing is needed and desired—and that it is effective—in communities of all sizes, geographies, and makeups.

Kewaunee County (Wisconsin) Sheriff’s Department

Kewaunee County, Wisconsin, is just 20 miles from Green Bay, the nearest big city. With its small and sparse population, however, it feels a lot farther: its approximately 20,000 residents are divided among nearly 50 cities, villages, towns, and unincorporated communities. The county seat, Kewaunee, has a population of less than 3,000, compared to 104,000 in Green Bay.

“We are a very rural county,” explains Kewaunee County Sheriff Matthew Joski. “We have four population centers: the City of Kewaunee, the City of Algoma, the Village of Luxemburg, and the Village of Casco. Everything else is primarily townships.”

Joski sees Kewaunee County’s size as an asset. “Because of their size, large governments are heavy with bureaucracy,” he says. “While it’s true that they probably have more resources, they also have such overwhelming numbers that those resources may pale in comparison to their need. And they unfortunately don’t have the kind of integrated working relationships that we have in a small community. I’m on a first-name basis with our district attorney, with our human services director, and with one of our mental health counselors because we all know each other personally. Those relationships, I think, actually give us an advantage over large departments because we’re able to problem-solve by literally picking up the phone and having informal conversations that have the power to effect change.”

Its relationships—both within government and outside it—form the core of the Kewaunee County Sheriff’s Department’s community policing strategy, according to Joski, who likens police-community relations to a “bank of good faith.”

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20. The Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative, which IACP and the COPS Office created in 2016, provides evaluations and technical support to 15 law enforcement agencies, and published reports highlighting the agencies’ program efforts constitute the Practices in Modern Policing series. For more details, see appendix B.


“On any given day, each and every officer either deposits into that bank or withdraws from it,” he says. “Whether it’s a traffic stop or a drug arrest, we make sure we’re making deposits with enforcement that [are] as fair, effective, and transparent as possible. That’s what fosters the sense of confidence our community has in its law enforcement agency. We build equity with small situations, so we can withdraw it later if we have a big crisis.”

Officers build equity not only with fair and transparent enforcement, but also with extracurricular community involvement—for example, coaching teens, volunteering for nonprofits, and attending fundraisers.

“We are fully integrated into our community,” Joski says. “Too often there is an ‘us versus them’ mentality. So, every action we take is done with the belief that we are servants to our community and not somehow separate from it.”

Of course, the same relationships that benefit the Kewaunee County Sheriff’s Department also challenge it, Joski acknowledges. “In small communities we have very strong, very historical relationships. Sometimes, we have to overcome those in order to do our job,” he says. “I’ve had to arrest people I grew up with, and people who I thought very highly of. That can be really hard, but we have to be unbiased. We have to reinforce the message that we are a professional department that cherishes our personal relationships, but also cherishes the obligation we have to our community to do effective, impartial policing.”

Building trust and legitimacy

In Kewaunee County and other small communities like it, relationships are the currency with which police officers purchase trust and legitimacy with long-time residents and new arrivals.

The county has seen an influx of Hispanic immigrants in the last decade due to growth in the local dairy industry, which has created surging demand for workers. Building trust and legitimacy with those workers has been a priority of the Kewaunee County Sheriff’s Department.

Providing bilingual services, including translators, is one way the department has begun making inroads with the Hispanic community to help them feel more comfortable interacting with and reporting crime to the department. The department also co-sponsored a “Know Your Rights” workshop, where immigration attorneys from Milwaukee spoke to local service providers who regularly interact with immigrants about immigrants’ legal status and rights. Joski amplified the workshop’s content among the workers themselves by hosting question-and-answer sessions at area farms.

“You could see there was a lot of concern about traffic stops and other minor interactions with law enforcement,” Joski recalls. “I hope they came away with a greater sense of comfort.”

Policy and oversight

To ensure its officers conduct themselves in a manner consistent with its values, the Kewaunee County Sheriff’s Department has made policy development and deployment a major priority.
Policies are developed in close collaboration between department personnel and a citizen-led oversight committee. “As administrators, we set policies but don’t necessarily appreciate or understand what those may look like when they’re actually deployed,” Joski says. “Getting feedback from a line officer who’s allowed to review the policy and give recommendations about how it would actually work if they were on a call at 3:00 a.m. on a Friday is really valuable. It creates ownership, and when there is more ownership of policies, there is more compliance with them.”

Disseminating policies has been another major focus, according to Joski, who says the department has replaced its printed policy manual with a digital one that can be loaded onto thumb drives for access by officers out in the field and in their squad cars.

“We want to make sure people have those policies readily available, and that they’re not just hiding among cobwebs in a back room somewhere,” explains Joski, who recently conceived the idea of a “policy of the month.” “We’ll integrate a new policy every month into memos, newsletters, and meetings so that people are constantly reviewing our policies and talking about them.”

Because the department has limited resources, the final piece of its policy process is teamwork, according to Joski, who says collaboration and shared services with other jurisdictions helps the department achieve its policy objectives within the confines of its budget. For example, the department shares its emergency response team with local municipalities, borrows its canine from the City of Kewaunee Police Department, and shares a drug task force with Door County.

“Collaboration is everything in small communities,” Joski says. “We can’t afford to have all the tools we want in our toolbox. But we know that if we partner with two other communities, for example, maybe the three of us together can justify [an investment]. . . . That may mean surrendering some of your power and some of your pride, but at least you can still have that investment as a resource, even if you can’t put your name on it.”

**Community policing and crime reduction**

Hispanic immigrants aren’t the only vulnerable population the Kewaunee County Sheriff’s Department has reached out to. In line with the task force’s community policing recommendations, it also has engaged with domestic violence victims and at-risk youth via community and government partnerships to co-produce public safety with these stakeholders.

One such partnership is with the Kewaunee County Violence Intervention Project (VIP). Established in 1989 by three local women who wanted to provide services to victims of domestic violence, it provides safe transitional housing for abuse victims as well as access to support groups and other resources. Since 1992, it has operated a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) team that comprises law enforcement, social services, victim advocates, and other relevant stakeholders; the team engages in open dialogue about case management in order to identify and fill gaps in victim services.

“If we have a domestic violence call, we’ll make them aware of it,” Joski says. “We can’t require the victim to call them, but once the call is done and the suspect has been arrested we will sit down with the victim and give them information provided by these advocates, so they know they have somebody they can call and talk to who can help them make informed choices going forward.”
Another partner is the Kewaunee County Department of Human Services. Together, they operate two programs that benefit local youth. The first is the Coordinated Services Team (CST) program, which takes a wraparound approach to meeting the needs of children. When a child is identified as being at risk, the CST initiative brings together individuals from multiple systems of care—such as mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, and special education—to collaboratively create and execute a plan for supporting the child and addressing his or her needs.

“When young people are going through struggles, it typically manifests as problems at school and at home,” Joski explains. “Rather than send them into the juvenile intake court, we look at what’s going on in their lives, and we surround them with a team of people who can [serve as surrogates] for the natural supports—family, neighbors, role models—that they may be missing in their lives.”

The second program is the Kewaunee County Drug Endangered Children (DEC) program, which also includes the Kewaunee County Department of Public Health, the Kewaunee County Corporation Counsel, and local schools. When law enforcement has contact with a local family for any reason, it notifies school officials so that teachers and administrators know the family’s children are going through something at home that may entitle them to extra support at school.

“We try to get information to teachers up front, so they can better understand what a young person is going through at home,” Joski says. “If they’re informed, maybe they can take a different approach to dealing with any negative reaction, responding to it as a trauma instead of a disruptive, delinquent, or belligerent behavior.”

**Officer wellness and safety**

Healthy relationships require healthy officers. In 2016, therefore, the Kewaunee County Sheriff’s Department turned its attention to officer wellness by launching Fit for Duty, a physical fitness program whose goal is reducing officers’ risk of cardiovascular disease by promoting exercise and nutrition. Developed by staff, for staff, Fit for Duty engages participants in regular fitness competitions using fitness trackers furnished by the department. Officers track their steps and activity on a daily basis and compete for individual or team rewards. Officers also receive quarterly fitness assessments and can work out in the department’s new onsite fitness center. The program will eventually include a mental health component, as well.

“With most other jobs, no matter how stressful they are, you can turn off at the end of the day and leave your work at the office,” Joski says. “Law enforcement in a small community is very different. You never really get to take your badge off. Whether you’re going to church, the grocery store, or a local football game, you’re known and identified at all times as a law enforcement officer. That can be really difficult because you’re never able to truly escape from that commitment. You’re never able to decompress. . . . We’re not there yet, but we recognize that we need to be attending to our officers’ mental health needs on a regular basis so that everybody is strong enough to do what they need to do to serve the community—not only physically, but mentally as well.”
South Dakota Highway Patrol

South Dakota is among the five least populous U.S. states, with just 865,000 people spread across 76,000 square miles—fewer than 11 people per square mile.23 South Dakota’s sparse population means that the South Dakota Highway Patrol (SDHP) has been practicing 21st century policing out of necessity since well before the 21st century, according to SDHP Superintendent Colonel Craig Price. The concepts of interagency collaboration and shared services that figure prominently in the task force’s recommendations aren’t new in South Dakota; rather, they’re tradition.

“One thing I think is really special about South Dakota is that there’s just not enough law enforcement for us to go out and do things on our own. We have to rely on working together with other agencies,” Price says. “It’s not uncommon for our troopers to go help sheriff’s deputies and police department officers with things like search warrants and welfare checks in the communities where they live. Because at the end of the day, people don’t care what your uniform or your badge says. They just want to know that a police officer is going to show up and help them out. So, our philosophy is: It doesn’t matter who you work for or who pays your check; we all have to work together to keep our state as safe as possible.”

Indeed, many aspects of 21st century policing are familiar to the SDHP’s 189 sworn personnel because of the rural environment in which they work. Others, however, require new—or renewed—focus, according to Price, who says the SDHP operates according to a three-year strategic plan, the most recent version of which aligns with many of the task force’s recommendations.

Building trust and legitimacy

A principal objective of 21st century policing is involving the community in police work, thereby giving citizens a voice in public safety policies and procedures. Involving police in community work can be just as powerful, however, because it gives citizens the opportunity to co-create tangible public safety outcomes, according to Price.

In particular, he says, community service—a core tenet of community policing—turns law enforcement into a collaborative discipline by creating a forum wherein police and citizens who are used to reacting to the effects of crime can proactively address the conditions that underlie it.

“We have 16 squads of troopers in South Dakota, and one thing we’ve challenged each of those squads to do over the last couple years is to come up with a formal community project in their squad area where they can go out and help a group in their community,” explains Price, who says one squad, in particular—the Glacial Lakes Squad of the SDHP’s Aberdeen District—rose to the occasion in 2016.

The idea began with Trooper Ben Pallesen, who encountered a neglected park one evening while responding to a burglary in progress in Sisseton, South Dakota. “There was a small area next to some tribal housing where there was a basketball court and a play area, but in between the park and where

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folks lived was an area that was full of trash and dead trees. People were afraid to send their kids to play on the playground because this area near it was so downtrodden,” Price recalls. “So [Pallesen] went to the tribal authorities, the city maintenance folks, the sheriff’s office, and the police department and said, ‘Hey. Maybe one day in a month or two we can all meet up, get some equipment, and clean up that area so people will feel comfortable letting their kids play there.’”

The Sisseton Wahpeton Housing Authority, the Sisseton Wahpeton Tribal Police, the Roberts County Sheriff’s Office, the South Dakota Motor Carrier Port of Entry, the City of Sisseton Street Department, and a well-known local family that owns the land around the park all agreed to help out. “Dozens of volunteers showed up,” continues Price, who says volunteers removed dead timber, cleaned up garbage, and installed new basketball nets and lighting. “They cleaned that thing up in a matter of hours and got some really good feedback from the folks who live in that community.”

The immediate, tangible benefits such projects create for communities yield long-term, intangible benefits for law enforcement, according to Price, who says non-enforcement activities like community service build trust and legitimacy on which law enforcement agencies can trade in times of crisis.

“You can solve problems a lot safer and a lot faster if you have relationships in place before a crisis hits,” Price says. “For that reason, we need to get to know people from other agencies and make connections with the people we serve… outside of the traditional policing environment.”

Policy and oversight

External oversight is another way the SDHP maintains its commitment to 21st century policing, according to Price, who says public feedback helps his agency stay the course. “When our citizens have opinions and concerns, we have to stop, listen, and take a look at how we’re doing business, because our citizens ultimately are who we work for.”

Citizens can contact the SDHP through several vehicles. One is an anonymous survey the agency began administering to the general public in 2015. Explains Price, “The survey basically says: Here are the things the Highway Patrol does. Is this what you think we should be doing? If you’ve had contact with a state trooper, was that contact a positive experience or a negative experience? Are we providing the services you expect us to provide? . . . What that feedback tells us is whether the priorities we have as an organization align with what the public expects of us.”

Community members also weigh in on law enforcement training and education, according to Price, who says SDHP has a publicly accountable training committee that meets periodically to discuss the agency’s training needs and performance. “We have a community member who sits on that training committee when it meets and offers their input from a public perspective,” he says.

Finally, there is a community representative on the committee that determines which troopers receive awards and commendations, as well as a community representative on the critical incident review board.
Training and education

Two of the biggest obstacles the SDHP faces in pursuit of its mission are recruitment and retention, according to Price, who says small and rural law enforcement agencies often have a hard time competing for talent because they can't match larger departments' pay, benefits, and advancement opportunities. Acquiring and developing effective troopers is therefore a major priority.

One thing that has helped the SDHP deepen its talent bench is leadership training, according to Price, who has instituted a leadership development program that teaches troopers the skills they need to become effective supervisors. If the agency can't recruit successful leaders, its thinking goes, it will make them, instead. Price says, “We've put a lot of effort into improving the quality of our leadership by giving folks opportunities to learn, for example, how to have difficult conversations and how to motivate people.”

Such training results not only in better leaders, but also in better recruitment and retention, as troopers who see opportunities for development and advancement are more likely to join the SDHP and stay there.

“We've done such a good job at developing leaders in our organization that it's now filtered down to our troopers,” Price says. “Troopers who have been in the organization for three, four, or five years are now starting to take some of the leadership courses and training opportunities, too, so that when they're eventually promoted they're ahead of the game.”

Also putting troopers “ahead of the game” when it comes to 21st century policing is emotional intelligence, according to Price, who says the SDHP has incorporated emotional intelligence training into both its recruit academy and its two-year training plan for troopers, who must complete 40 hours of continuing education every 24 months in order to retain their certification.

“Most of our contacts with community members are in an enforcement setting, which of course can be uncomfortable for the violator. We want our troopers to have every tool possible in their tool belt to be able to deal with those scenarios as safely as possible for everyone involved,” Price says. “That includes not only physical tools, but also emotional ones. Because the better you know yourself, and the better you understand how other people react and respond to certain situations, the more successful your interactions are going to be.”

Officer wellness and safety

The SDHP currently is developing a comprehensive officer wellness program as part of its commitment to 21st century policing.

“It will be a robust program that looks at everything from physical fitness and mental health to getting the right peer support,” explains Price. “Troopers need that kind of support throughout their career because they confront a lot of bad stuff. For example, we go to a fatal car crash once every three days. That's a lot to deal with over the course of your career.”
Officers who work in rural settings, as many state troopers do, are especially vulnerable. “If you’re a state trooper in a marked police unit, your office is in your car,” Price says. “When you’re in your car working, it’s solitary most of the time. You don’t have anyone to talk to, so if something happens you’re usually forced to deal with the aftermath of it by yourself. . . . There’s got to be a better way to help folks deal with the things they experience on the job, and that’s what we’re hoping to find out [by developing an officer wellness program].”

Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department (Michigan)

In many communities, 21st century policing must be retrofitted to existing policies, practices, and procedures. The Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians—also known as the Gun Lake Tribe—is not one of those communities. Instead, it built its brand-new law enforcement agency from the ground up around these principles.

“Some of the concepts of 21st century policing are the foundation of this department,” Gun Lake Tribe Director of Grant Planning and Management Catherine Adsitt says of the Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department. The department was established in 2011 after a three-year planning process that began with the convening of the Gun Lake Tribe’s Public Safety Advisory Committee. Comprising eight members—including tribal members and representatives from the Gun Lake Tribal Gaming Commission and the Gun Lake Tribal Business Board, among others—the committee was created in 2008 to represent the community’s interests to an external consultant who was hired to create the tribe’s first-ever police force. “We did everything from picking out uniforms and real estate to interviewing the public safety director,” recalls Advisory Committee chair Amanda Sprague, Gun Lake Tribe’s court administrator. “We developed the entire infrastructure for the Public Safety Department.”

The committee’s role in creating the Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department ensured that tribal law enforcement reflected the community it served. The committee proved so valuable that once the external consultant completed his work, it was retained as a permanent fixture to advise on the tribe’s public safety policies, priorities, budget, and hiring practices.

The result, according to Sprague, is a tribal police force that not only serves and protects the community, but also represents it. “Now that the Public Safety Department is completely up and running, our committee makes sure it keeps the tribal perspective in mind,” she says. “We represent the tribe’s traditions, culture, and values, which keeps the department close to the tribe.”

Building trust and legitimacy

Building trust and legitimacy has been a goal for the Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department since day one, according to Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Director Richard Rabenort.

“One of the things we immediately focused on [at our inception] was developing trust between the police department and the community,” Rabenort says. “That was really important, because in a lot of tribes there is fundamental distrust toward the police based just on the history of sovereign nations.”
The Public Safety Advisory Committee is one mechanism through which the department builds trust and legitimacy. Because it recognizes that informal interactions with community members can be just as powerful as formal ones, non-enforcement activities are another tool it leverages—particularly with tribal youth.

“The tribe will be around for a long, long time, so our youth obviously are our primary concern,” explains Rabenort, who says tribal police officers regularly attend and host community events like bike rodeos for young members of the tribe, even going so far as to serve as counselors at Gun Lake Tribe’s summer camp.

The department also has an open-door policy at its headquarters, the reception area of which is staffed and open to the public during business hours; has deliberately excluded radar units from officers’ vehicles in order to discourage over-aggressive enforcement; and has a patch and uniforms that were recently redesigned with traditional tribal symbols to make the officers appear more friendly and approachable.

“Our connection with the community is what makes us unique,” Adsitt says. “There is no separation of community members and law enforcement because there has always been open communication and trust between them.”

Policy and oversight

Since becoming a federally recognized tribe in 1999, Gun Lake Tribe has experienced remarkable growth. Although its tribal government began with just 30 employees, it now has 140. Meanwhile, the tribe continues to annex new land and build new amenities, including a casino that opened in 2011 and a new government campus that was completed in 2015.

While its rapid growth has created opportunities for the tribe, it has created challenges for tribal law enforcement, according to Rabenort. “The tribe is constantly acquiring land adjacent to its reservation to bring tribal members back to the sovereign nation,” he says, noting that tribal lands extend in a checkerboard pattern in either direction from its central reservation, creating a large and fractured footprint. “Compared to other departments, that means we’re constantly in flux and always in motion.”

Achieving its objectives in such a dynamic environment requires the Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department to maintain a state of constant communication and collaboration with other tribal departments, which it achieves thanks in large part to a comprehensive and holistic strategic plan under which the whole of tribal government unites.

“One of the things that’s really unique about the tribe is that no department is viewed in isolation,” Adsitt says. “When we talk about projects and programs or challenges and opportunities, it’s looked at holistically—community-wide and across departments. It’s rare that the Department of Public Safety does anything without collaborating and partnering with other parts of government, and vice versa. It’s a different approach than a lot of municipalities have; because it’s a tribe, it’s much more connected.”

Echoes Rabenort, “We’re not an island. We participate in every other department that’s here, whether it’s [the Department of] Education; Public Works; Health and Human Services; or Grants, Planning and Management. The communication between all of us is really important, and it’s why we’re successful.”
When the tribe’s casino is ready to build its planned hotel, for example, the Department of Public Safety needs to know so it can discuss the development’s public safety implications and plan for them well before construction commences. “A lot of communities do a strategic plan, but they do it for individual departments,” Rabenort says. “Our strategic planning process involves everyone, so we can decide together what direction the tribe wants to go.”

That same spirit of collaboration extends to other law enforcement agencies, as well.

“Our policies and procedures mirror those of the sheriff’s department and the state,” notes Rabenort, who says tribal officers are certified by the state of Michigan, federally commissioned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services, and deputized through the Allegan County Sheriff’s Department. “Recently, a surrounding community had problems staffing so they asked us if we would cover their community during their officers’ absence. What was neat about that experience is that when we went into that community to provide service, the members of that community never even questioned why a tribal police officer was there; they understood that we all work together as one group.”

Adds Adsitt, “The challenge all rural departments have is policing a big space with limited numbers of people. The solution to that is working together.”

**Training and education**

Gun Lake Tribe’s holistic approach to strategic planning has infused the Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department with a guardian mindset, according to Rabenort, who says the department was designed from the ground up to be responsive to the tribe’s changing needs as it grows and evolves.

Its responsiveness is especially evident in its training efforts, according to Adsitt, who says the public often is invited to participate in police training so that community members and law enforcement can collaborate more effectively to address the tribe’s public safety needs. “When appropriate, the Public Safety Department opens its training not only to outside law enforcement, but also to community members,” she says. “Because when the community has the opportunity to learn how officers make decisions—and see for themselves what challenges officers face—it creates transparency and understanding.”

For example, the department recently used a U.S. Department of Justice Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS) grant to acquire a 180-degree training simulator system that provides an immersive training environment in which to offer officers firearms and use-of-force training. Allowing community members to experience the simulator helps them appreciate the tough judgment officers must exercise in the field.

“When community members can understand exactly what an officer goes through, it really opens up the lines of communication,” Rabenort says.

Although no one can predict the future, open communication helps the Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department anticipate future needs and develop its officers to meet them. Effective April 2018, for instance, all tribal police officers will also be trained emergency medical technicians (EMT).
“Because we're rural, it could be 10 to 15 minutes before the nearest fire department arrives—and that's too long to wait if someone's having a heart attack,” explains Rabenort, who decided to invest in EMT training for his officers in the wake of several medical emergencies that took place at Gun Lake Tribe's government campus, casino, and other tribal venues. “Even though EMT training is very, very expensive, in the long run we think it's a very, very big benefit to this community.”

Because the tribe's future is the community's primary concern, the “long run” is always on the department's mind, according to Rabenort. “The Public Safety Department has a succession plan that's very important. We have a plan to make sure that somebody is always going to be able to fill my shoes, for instance, our secretary's shoes, and our investigator's shoes to ensure consistency through the years,” he says. “We also have a mentoring program where we bring tribal members into the police and public-safety realm and give them the opportunity through a mentorship to see if they're interested in law enforcement as a profession. . . . Everything we do is about looking to the future.”
CONCLUSION

“In a small town, as a police officer, you have to be proactive and self-governable. . . . We present law enforcement as a positive, and I think most small towns do that. We know people by name. We have cold tea on the front porch and hot coffee with them in the mornings. I don’t think chiefs in cities get the opportunity to do that.”

– Barry Bonner, Chief of Police, Sterlington, Louisiana

Although small, rural, and tribal communities by definition are little, their presence in America is undeniably big. And as the risks facing them evolve—opioid addiction, domestic violence, theft, and assault are common in small and rural communities—so, too, will their law enforcement grow and adapt to reduce crime and meet the needs in their communities.

While the obstacles for small, rural, and tribal communities are challenging—finite resources, a limited talent pool, and geographic hurdles to traditional community policing deployment strategies—the pilot sites profiled in this publication illustrate that these communities are well positioned to meet public safety needs by leveraging their innate strengths, including their tight-knit relationships with community members, their close integration with government peers, their enthusiastic collaboration with external law enforcement agencies, and their natural inclination toward transparency.

Even within the small, rural, and tribal categories, there are considerable differences in agency size, population density, geographic area, and economic opportunity that influence how law enforcement agencies police and support their communities. Using the broad set of concepts presented in the final task force report, small, rural, and tribal law enforcement agencies can conceive and execute strategies that reaffirm and reinforce that trust and legitimacy, ensuring Americans’ continued public safety in communities of all shapes and sizes.


APPENDIX A. HISTORY OF THE TASK FORCE ON 21ST CENTURY POLICING

Trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve is essential in a democracy. Following several high-profile events that exposed rifts in this relationship, U.S. President Barack Obama established the Task Force on 21st Century Policing on December 18, 2014. The task force, comprising experts in the fields of policing, criminal justice, civil rights, academia, and other arenas, heard testimony from stakeholders around the United States and identified best practices to reduce crime and build trust between the public and law enforcement, with an emphasis on mutual respect and fair and equitable treatment.

The Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing set forth six main topic areas, or pillars, found to be essential to healthy community-police relations: (1) building trust and legitimacy, (2) policy and oversight, (3) technology and social media, (4) community policing and crime reduction, (5) training and education, and (6) officer safety and wellness. Within these pillars, the task force laid out 59 recommendations with 92 action items. These practical steps provide a road map to help law enforcement and communities move forward to mend and strengthen relationships.

Pillar 1. Building Trust and Legitimacy

A law enforcement agency must not be seen by the community as an occupying force but rather as a legitimate, trusted, and fair authority. Embracing a guardian rather than a warrior mentality will help law enforcement gain the trust and respect of those they serve. This can be achieved through positive, nonenforcement activities (e.g., Coffee with a Cop, National Night Out, or officer athletic or activity leagues) that engage the community. The task force also recommended that agencies adopt procedural justice as their guiding principle and establish transparency and accountability to ensure that decision-making is understood by citizens. Last, creating a diverse workforce that mirrors the community will increase trust building.

Pillar 2. Policy and Oversight

An agency’s policies should reflect community values. An agency can ensure this by developing comprehensive policies and responsive strategies “that reduce crime by improving relationships, increasing community engagement, and fostering cooperation.” Clear and comprehensive policies that ensure formal checks and balances and data analysis are critical. For example, an agency should make sure that its SRO policy states that SROs should never enforce school discipline rules and are there only to enforce crime problems.

26. For background on the task force implementation, findings, and recommendations, read the Final Report of the President’s Task Force (see note 7).

27. “Executive Summary,” Final Report of the President’s Task Force, 2 (see note 7).
Pillar 3. Technology and Social Media

Through the use of technology and social media, law enforcement can engage the community (particularly youth) and educate and inform citizens in an up-to-date and evolving way. Implementing new technologies can provide law enforcement agencies with an opportunity to engage the community in a discussion about their expectations for transparency, accountability, and privacy. Agencies also should monitor social media for enforcement purposes and learn about the issues that are important to the community. Using social media can also help keep the community informed about major events and provide up-to-date reports on live incidents.

Pillar 4. Community Policing and Crime Reduction

By encouraging and implementing policies that support community-based partnerships, officers can reduce crime and increase trust. Working alongside residents to identify problems and collaborate on “implementing solutions that produce meaningful results” for all engages residents, provides them with a stake in the outcome, and promotes mutual respect.28

Pillar 5. Training and Education

Cadets, line officers, and executives should respond to the challenges of modern policing. Academy and in-service trainings should focus on previously unaddressed subjects such as mental health, cultural differences, and youth brain development. High-quality, effective training, particularly that which comes from a highly regarded academic institution, will enable officers to better understand the diverse populations with which they work.

Pillar 6. Officer Wellness and Safety

The stress that accompanies being a law enforcement officer cannot be understated. For this reason, the mental and physical health of officers is crucial to effective and equitable policing, which is why promoting safety and wellness throughout an agency is important. Endorsing practices that support officer safety and wellness (e.g., evaluating and adjusting shift lengths or requiring officers to wear bulletproof vests) will enable officers to better do their jobs.

APPENDIX B. THE ADVANCING 21ST CENTURY POLICING INITIATIVE AND ITS 15 MODEL SITES

The Task Force on 21st Century Policing’s goal of transforming the thinking and organizational approach of U.S. law enforcement is intended to be applicable to every size and type of law enforcement agency. Given the local design of the U.S. law enforcement model, it is critical that local agencies adapt the implementation of the task force recommendations to fit their individual needs and capacities. Agencies ready to implement the task force recommendations will need to develop strategies to achieve such change.

In May 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and CNA (a nonprofit research and analysis organization), launched the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative, which provides evaluations and technical support to the following 15 state and local law enforcement agencies that already have made strides in implementing the task force recommendations:

1. Albany (New York) Police Department
2. Arlington (Texas) Police Department
3. Atlanta (Georgia) Police Department
4. Camden County (New Jersey) Police Department
5. Columbia (South Carolina) Police Department
6. Doral (Florida) Police Department
7. Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department (Michigan)
8. Hennepin County (Minnesota) Sheriff’s Office
9. Indio (California) Police Department
10. Kewaunee County (Wisconsin) Sheriff’s Department
11. Louisville (Kentucky) Metro Police Department
12. Lowell (Massachusetts) Police Department
13. San Antonio (Texas) Police Department
14. South Dakota Highway Patrol
15. Tucson (Arizona) Police Department
These agencies vary widely in size, type, and location. Their diversity ensures that the information stemming from the initiative is useful to the greatest number of agencies throughout the United States.

Armed with lessons and information learned from these sites, the IACP and the COPS Office have created a series of companion guides to the final task force report. This series, Practices in Modern Policing, focuses on common and emergent themes from the report and highlights programs from the 15 sites. In each case, it is important to note that post-implementation studies will be needed to measure the impact of these new policies and programs.
ABOUT THE IACP

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is the world’s largest and most influential professional association for police leaders. With more than 30,000 members in 150 countries, the IACP is a recognized leader in global policing. Since 1893, the association has been speaking out on behalf of law enforcement and advancing leadership and professionalism in policing worldwide.

The IACP is known for its commitment to shaping the future of the police profession. Through timely research, programming, and unparalleled training opportunities, the IACP is preparing current and emerging police leaders—and the agencies and communities they serve—to succeed in addressing the most pressing issues, threats, and challenges of the day.

The IACP is a not-for-profit 501c(3) organization headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. The IACP is the publisher of The Police Chief magazine, the leading periodical for law enforcement executives, and host of the IACP annual conference, the largest police educational and technology exposition in the world. IACP membership is open to law enforcement professionals of all ranks, as well as non-sworn leaders across the criminal justice system. Learn more about the IACP at www.theIACP.org.
In 2016, the COPS Office, in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police and CNA, launched the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative. This program provides evaluations and technical support to 15 law enforcement agencies. Because these agencies are diverse in size, location, and other characteristics, their insights and lessons learned can be useful to various other agencies across the nation. Reports on their efforts in the program are published as part of the Practices in Modern Policing series. These reports offer guidance to the field for advancing practices and policies in specific aspects of community policing.

This publication is focused on how small, rural, and tribal agencies can leverage their distinctive strengths in order to build communities that are healthy, safe, and productive.