



Community Member Feedback as an Effective Tool for Building and Maintaining Trust

Building and maintaining trust and legitimacy with the communities they serve is paramount for police agencies. Community members should be recognized as essential partners in maintaining public safety and offered meaningful and accessible opportunities to provide feedback to police agencies.

Community member feedback can be positive, negative, or a combination of both. Feedback may arise due to a genuine desire to commend actions taken or observed, miscommunication, or confusion about processes. Questions posed by community members do not always equate to complaints, and all agency personnel are encouraged to view feedback as opportunities for further conversation and engagement with community members. Ensure methods to capture all forms of feedback are in place and effectively utilize them to allow agencies to build a more comprehensive platform for shared trust.

When developing feedback opportunities, consider the following:

- **Contact points:** Community members experience agency contact through a variety of intersection points and through multiple agency personnel (e.g., sworn officers and supervisors, professional staff, crime scene investigators, student interns, volunteers). Each contact carries the potential to strengthen or detract from trust-building efforts, and feedback opportunities should be inclusive of all agency functions and personnel.
- **Language:** Prioritize accessible, inclusive language choices. Reframing 'Citizen Complaint Process' to 'Community Member Feedback Opportunity' on the agency webpage can expand the information received. Retitling a form field from 'Complainant' to 'Community Member' can impact the tone of information documented.
- **Access and Communication:** Information outlining processes for feedback should be posted on the agency webpage, in publicly accessible areas of agency buildings, and promoted through agency social media platforms. This information should include expectations for privacy of feedback shared, timelines for associated processes, and communication of resulting actions. To advance trust-building efforts, agencies must ensure the availability of this information in languages and formats used by community members.

Community member feedback can be delivered in various forms, and agencies should develop processes to capture and act upon each of the following:

- **Informal feedback** – emails to agency personnel, spontaneous communication during patrol and nonenforcement activities, calls to main phone lines, nonemergency calls to communications
- **Online portals** – feedback forms and surveys on agency webpage and social media platforms
- **Supervisory contact** – information directed to command staff, sworn supervisors of all ranks, and professional staff supervisors
- **Formal complaints** – information received electronically or in person that meets established criteria for investigation through Internal Affairs

Responding to and Tracking Feedback

Agencies can demonstrate their commitment to trust building efforts by taking clear and decisive actions in response to feedback received. Establishing systems to track and review all modes and content of feedback serves as the primer for agencies to act on identified patterns of conduct, modify agency-wide training priorities, revise policies and practices, and highlight positive community interactions. These systems may also aid in the identification of circumstances that require alternative responses due to potential conflicts of interest (e.g., formal complaint alleging misconduct by a chief executive, formal complaint alleging criminal activity by an investigator while on duty). Utilization of an independent, unbiased, and knowledgeable external investigator or investigative agency may provide an avenue for objective and impartial recommendations for action.



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Clearly established processes and tracking systems for community feedback will allow agencies to readily compile summary reports for dissemination to internal personnel, partner agencies, and the communities they serve. Routine assessments of the agency are a way to proactively ensure that high standards are being implemented and reflect the needs and desires of the community.

Outcomes of Feedback

All stakeholders involved in community member feedback, including community members, agency personnel, agencies, and communities served can benefit from a comprehensive platform for shared trust. Possible outcomes of community member feedback for these groups may include:

Community Members

- Validation of concerns
- Education related to agency, investigative, and criminal justice processes
- Enhanced trust
- Access to procedural justice

Considerations:

When community members provide feedback to policing agencies, it is important for them to feel heard. Outcomes may vary by case, but the act of engaging in conversation, acknowledging where improvements can be made, and inviting community members to be involved in problem-solving can contribute to building trust. When feedback is provided, police agencies can also use the opportunity to provide educational information about agency, investigative, and criminal justice processes. These processes are often complex, and community members may have misconceptions about how they work. Transparent, understandable explanations can help community members learn about the ways in which the agency is working to ensure public safety. Moreover, explanations of how feedback is addressed and how agency and criminal justice system decisions are made support community members' access to procedural justice and inclusion in outcomes that impact them.

Agency Personnel

- Personnel development/ corrective/growth opportunities
- Enhanced skills for co-produced solutions
- Recognition of quality performance (informal and formal)

Considerations:

Community members may provide feedback about individual personnel, units or departments within the agency, or the agency as a whole. Community member feedback regarding individual agency personnel or units/departments often results in opportunities to enhance training or skills. For example, if a community member who experienced victimization contacts the supervisor of the assigned investigator and expresses concern about limited case updates, the supervisor can coach the investigator on explaining agency processes, developing communication plans with victims, and making resource referrals. The investigator can practice these skills when following up with the community member. Agency personnel can also benefit from receiving notifications when positive feedback about their work is received. This can be informal (e.g., acknowledgement letter or email to the personnel from their supervisor or agency leadership) or formal (e.g., consideration for commendations or awards). By developing opportunities for community members to provide both positive and negative feedback, agencies can partner with those they serve to co-create solutions and reinforce effective policing skills.



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Agencies

- Resource development (common topics of interest or concern)
- Expanded opportunities for participation in investigative processes
- Decreased frequency of contentious interactions and potential risk

Considerations:

Community member feedback may translate into identification of gaps in training or public information provided by the agency, creative solutions, and new partnering opportunities. For example, if an agency receives multiple calls about the same topic or concern, opportunities to provide additional information and resources to the public can be identified (e.g., through social media, on the agency webpage, through development of additional resources such as informational pamphlets). Through inclusion of community member feedback, agencies can benefit from increased objectivity, reduction in the perception of bias, and a comprehensive system of checks and balances. This can also reinforce the important roles and voices of community members, leading to increased community cohesion and the potential for increased participation in investigations and reporting of criminal activity. This responsive, inclusive approach can transform what may seem like a complaint into a productive, collaborative process. Agencies that incorporate community member feedback in this way may see a reduction in contentious interactions and risk to the agency (e.g., formal complaints, litigation).

Communities

- Enhanced trust in policing agencies
- Increased sense of community safety through responsive policing

Considerations:

Transparency of police processes and a platform for community voice in these processes can enhance overall trust and legitimacy with the communities they serve. This can lead to expanded opportunities for collaborative problem solving and communities seeing police as a positive community resource. Additionally, providing effective response to community member feedback sends the message that the agency values community members as partners in public safety. Community members who may be directly or indirectly impacted by crime or who have been uncomfortable or experienced barriers reporting crimes in the past may be more likely to report to law enforcement when they see increased transparency and positive changes being made. This can increase the likelihood that offenders are held accountable, contributing to overall safety of communities.



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Police agencies are encouraged to adopt a collaborative model where policing takes place **with** communities instead of simply **in** them. Collaboration can contribute to community members feeling not only more **protected** but also more **protective**—of the people and places in their communities, the values their communities represent, and the police agencies that defend their safety and preserve their quality of life. Transparent, responsive processes for receiving, evaluating, and acting on community member feedback should be a key component in an agency's overall philosophy of viewing the communities they serve as essential partners in public safety. Incorporation of community member feedback can support co-creation of solutions and build bridges around this common purpose.

IACP Resources

- A. IACP [Community-Police Engagement Page](#)
- B. IACP Model Policy: [Social Media](#)
- C. IACP Model Policy: [Standards of Conduct](#)
- D. IACP Model Policy: [Retaliatory Conduct by Employees](#)
- E. IACP [Policy Framework for Improved Community Police Engagement](#)
- F. IACP [Law Enforcement Policy Resource Center](#)