



# Community Engagement and Dialogue

The challenges of modern policing call for police agencies to continue building and maintaining trust and legitimacy with the communities they serve. Community members are not merely the recipients of police services, they are essential partners in maintaining public safety. By embracing approaches that recognize the voices and roles of community members, police agencies can prioritize effective community engagement. Community-police engagement is a guiding principle for police agencies that emphasizes working with community members to identify problems and co-produce tangible solutions.

## Community Policing and Procedural Justice

Community-police engagement goes beyond the behavior and tactics of police and focuses on the systematic engagement in partnerships and problem-solving techniques that result in meaningful organizational transformation.<sup>1</sup> Research and practice show that the public cares as much about how police interact with them as the outcomes of policing actions.<sup>2</sup> Effective community-police engagement relies upon the four central principles of procedural justice:

1. Treating people with dignity and respect
2. Giving individuals “voice” during encounters
3. Being neutral and transparent in decision-making
4. Conveying trustworthy motives<sup>3</sup>

## Community-Police Engagement Considerations

To enhance community participation and support community-police engagement efforts, consider the following strategies:

### Establish Equitable Opportunities

#### ■ Listen first

Equitable engagement involves listening to community members about their concerns and how their communities can best be served. Through listening, law enforcement agencies can earn a reputation that is based on partnership instead of power, which

increases their legitimacy in the communities they serve. Key topics for conversations include:

- Community safety concerns
- New policies or questions about existing policies
- High-profile community incidents
- Agency technology (e.g., body-worn cameras, license plate readers)
- Their view of day to day interactions with members of the agency, sworn and civilian

#### ■ Remove barriers to participation

Engagement opportunities rely on the ability of community members to participate. The first step to participation is feeling welcome and agencies should consider the following:

- Communicating engagement opportunities in languages and formats understood by community members
- Rotating meetings between different locations, days, and times
- Providing virtual participation options if feasible
- Communicating frequently via email, social media, and community events
- Solicit information from diverse communities to find the best way to relay information to those communities through both official and unofficial leaders

1 Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, *Community Policing Defined* (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, 2014), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p157-pub.pdf>.  
2 Cynthia Lum et al., *An Evidence Assessment of the Recommendations of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing – Implementation and Research Priorities* (Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2016), <http://cebcop.org/wp-content/evidence-based-policing/IACP-GMU-Evidence-Assessment-Task-Force-FINAL.pdf>; Kyle Peyton, Michael Sierra-Arévalo, and David G. Rand, “A Field Experiment on Community Policing and Police Legitimacy,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 40 (2019): 19894 – 19898, <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/early/2019/09/10/1910157116.full.pdf>.  
3 Lorraine Mazerolle et al., “Legitimacy in Policing: A Systematic Review,” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 9, no. 1 (2013), <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/141/>.



# Community Engagement and Dialogue

## ■ Embrace diversity

Communities are diverse and all engagement opportunities should reflect efforts to incorporate the larger community. That includes not only racial and ethnic diversity but also diversity of age, occupation, gender, sexual orientation, faith traditions, physical ability, and income. High-quality, effective training will enable agency personnel to better understand the diverse populations with whom they work.

## Engage in Productive Dialogue

### ■ Be transparent

Prioritize transparent administration, operations, and communications to ensure that actions and decisions made by police agencies are understood by the community. Consider all communication platforms and mediums to engage the community in discussions about expectations for transparency, accountability, and privacy. Agencies can learn about issues that are important to the community through these platforms and mediums.

## Facilitate Collective Solutions

### ■ Collaborate

Police agencies must intentionally seek community member input in the formation, implementation, and maintenance of engagement efforts. This includes input from community members who hold supportive, neutral, and critical viewpoints. Through nonenforcement activities that are solutions-focused, agencies can be viewed as legitimate, trusted, and fair.

### ■ Pursue partnerships with community organizations

Community organizations can be key stakeholders for building partnerships. Trust is often transferable, so community members who trust partner organizations may also trust police agencies, creating a foundation of legitimacy that can be leveraged for community cohesion.

## Act on Community Feedback

### ■ Promote mutual participation by community and police

Partnerships work best when equal contributions deliver mutual benefit. Police agencies should promote shared identification of priorities and

development of co-produced solutions. With each community engagement opportunity, agencies should be prepared to receive input, act on the feedback, and relay decisions and outcomes back to the community.

### ■ Encourage empathy through shared perspectives

When community members and police understand and appreciate how policing is carried out and experienced, opportunities for meaningful engagement can occur. Community engagement opportunities can serve as platforms for mutual education around the mental and physical wellness of police agency personnel and the overall wellness of communities. For communities to experience effective and equitable policing, the mental and physical wellness of officers must be considered.

Police agencies should 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. Police agencies must facilitate partnership and accountability, both of which can be nurtured with community engagement strategies and active community participation.

Co-creation of programs, policies, and strategies through community-police engagement opportunities can authentically and organically build understanding, trust, confidence, respect, and diversity of thought. Police, together with community partners and stakeholders, can develop strategies that erode barriers and build bridges around shared objectives and a common purpose.

## IACP Resources

IACP [Community-Police Engagement Page](#)

IACP Model Policy: [Social Media](#)

IACP Model Policy: [Research Partnerships](#)

IACP [Policy Framework for Improved Community-Police Engagement](#)

IACP [Law Enforcement Policy Resource Center](#)