

LONGMONT:

Community Policing Starts With Communication

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LONGMONT

Community Policing Starts With Communication

The Advancing Community Policing Grant

Background

In 1993, the Longmont Police Department (LPD) was typical of most police departments in the United States. It consisted of men and women working in a top-down, command-and-control environment. Personnel were managed with excessive policies and procedures. Employees depended on their superiors for inspiration and for sustaining morale. Policing in Longmont was done by the rules, in a “cookbook” fashion. It was almost entirely budget-driven and restrictive, leaving little room for ingenuity or creative problem solving.

The Advancing Community Policing (ACP) grant was awarded to LPD approximately two years after the department’s long-range strategic plan was completed. That plan called for several initiatives to build better communication and discussion links with the community. Although the city council had agreed to help fund the initiative outlined in the strategic plan, the plan required the police department to use multiple budget years over an extended period of time, which created a time delay in the implementation of some strategies. Projects would be funded over four years.

Police Chief Michael Butler says there was another concern: “It seemed that unless the police initiated and continued to maintain the community policing efforts, there was a good chance that viable options for dealing with issues would just

with away for lack of interest.” Butler went on to say that the information and communication links between police and citizens had traditionally been one-way and not frequent or substantive enough to develop partnerships.

Other challenges for LPD included the following:

- Police were isolated within the community, with little cooperation from businesses and other entities.
- There was an us-versus-them mentality between police and the community.
- There was no planning process.
- There was no cooperation between police and other city departments.
- The department had poor media relations.
- Citizens depended on police to solve all crime and social problems.
- There was no data and trend analysis (the department lacked personnel and equipment).
- There were too many internal affairs complaints.

Because of the historical lack of communication between police and citizens, the grant was submitted with the request that the COPS Office help LPD fund the necessary communication links to

increase the department’s capacity to develop true partnerships with the community.

LPD had two positive attributes that indicated fertile ground for community policing: good, dedicated employees and a community that seemed open to participating in a partnership with the police.

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Police Chief Michael Butler

The real challenge within LPD was creating a place where people believed they owned their work and that what they did had meaning and purpose. Creating an environment where employees worked as partners was also a significant challenge. LPD’s main objective with community policing was to build true partnerships with the community that included the elements of joint accountability and absolute honesty between

partners, equal responsibility for determining the future, and giving each partner the right to say “no.”

The Project

Chief Butler says he knew that only an integrated approach to organizational development would work. “All of the management systems, leadership practices, and architecture,” says Butler, “had to be on the same page. We had to change not only the systems and the architecture to support the internal partnership-based philosophy, but also the relationships we had with our community.”

The management systems that needed overhauling were:

- Recruitment and selection
- Training
- Performance management
- Budget
- Directives (rules and regulations)
- Beats (from quadrants to beat and staff development system)
- Communication (not dispatch, but how to talk with each other)

- Recognition and rewards
- Behavior modification
- Planning (strategic plan)

Recruitment and Selection. Chief Butler began by changing the profile of the police officers hired in Longmont. The department began looking for life-experienced, educated people with good interpersonal and other communication skills and the capacity to work in partnership and diversity. The recruiting philosophy was also changed to find people more interested in the spirit of service than in the spirit of adventure.

Training. Several courses on problem solving, communication skills, and utilizing community resources were added to the police training curriculum. The objectives were to teach employees the concepts of partnership and how to work in partnership with citizens and each other.

Performance Management. The performance appraisal system was changed from a top-down methodology to a partnership format. Employees and supervisors began to work together closely to develop and clarify expectations for the upcoming year. A career development program that included an increase in salaries for police officers was developed.

Budget. Butler says, “We redesigned our budgeting process to give more ownership to smaller units within the police department.” The change allowed more people to be involved with the purchasing and procurement of equipment and capital, as well as spending some discretionary money.

Directives. The department’s directive system was condensed from several large manuals into one and redesigned to look less like a tool for management and more like a resource guide for employees. In the past, such changes occurred

via managers’ recommendations; now, every employee had the opportunity to recommend such changes.

Beats. The former beat system consisted of dividing the city of Longmont into quadrants, with officers assigned randomly on any given shift to any part of the city. In the new system, the city is segmented into districts defined by neighborhoods. Officers are assigned to a district for a full year and often renew their beat assignment during the annual shift/beat bid. Butler says this “has been an invaluable tool in supporting our officers into

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Longmont, Colorado is a fast-growing city located 30 miles north of Denver. It lies just east of and parallel to the Rocky Mountains. From its agricultural beginning in 1870, Longmont has grown into a community that supports service businesses, light industry, and high-tech and manufacturing businesses. Longmont’s

population of 71,093 is 76.8 percent white and 19.1 percent Hispanic, 1.7 percent Asian, and 2.4 percent other.* The Longmont Police Department (LPD) is composed of 107 commissioned and 35 civilian personnel. The majority of complaints made to police are about traffic and disorder.

* U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

LONGMONT POLICE DEPARTMENT

LOCATION: LONGMONT, COLORADO

CHIEF: MICHAEL BUTLER

CONTACT: WWW.CI.LONGMONT.CO.US/POLICE

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE CATEGORY: RE-ENGINEERING OTHER COMPONENTS

AMOUNT FUNDED: \$249,791

SITE VISIT: JANUARY 16, 2001

taking more ownership for their areas and helping them to work successfully in partnership with our citizens.”

Communication. All meetings are now open to any employee to attend. Agendas, to which employees can contribute, are published in advance. Monthly staff meetings, called “departmentwide conversations,” are now held.

Recognition and Rewards. The annual awards banquet and ceremony has dramatically increased the number of citizens who receive recognition by including new awards such as the Community Policing Award.

Behavior Modification. The entire discipline system was modified to reflect management working in partnership with employees. The responsibility for evolving behavior was pushed away from the chief’s office to first-line supervisors. Prior to the changes that moved the department toward both partnership and community policing, formal citizen complaints averaged 100 per year. Since 1995, the average has been only two formal complaints per year.

Planning. Perhaps the most comprehensive strategy to help initiate community policing was the development of a long-range strategic plan. To develop that plan, teams of employees were sent on fact-finding missions to seven police departments across North America. Each department

was recognized as a leader in community policing, and some had already developed strategic plans. Each team of employees prepared and presented comprehensive reports on their site visits to the department and community members. Chief Butler says the result was an increased understanding of community policing and a significantly better grasp of the importance of creating and implementing a long-range strategic plan.

One of the main objectives of the planning process was to identify the responsibilities of the police department and the communities. As the discussions evolved and the police became more comfortable talking about their true capacity, it became more apparent that the police were merely partners in improving the quality of life in the community.

The resulting strategic plan now includes more than 200 initiatives. It is modified every other year and reviewed monthly in staff meetings. “Over time,” says Chief Butler, “we have turned the corner. In fact, the other departments in our city have converted many of their systems to work more in partnership with their employees.

“The Advancing Community Policing grant opportunity could not have come at a better time for us,” says Chief Butler. “We believed we had already done all the groundwork in preparing for a grant, not knowing the ACP grant would be

available. We wanted the decision-makers for the distribution of grant money to understand and appreciate that we were not developing a new idea because grant money was available, but that all of our planning and preparation would increase our likelihood of obtaining the grant. It worked. In fact, our strategic plan was the goose that laid the golden egg for many grant opportunities; truly an unintended, but very successful consequence.”

The ACP grant funded several initiatives that greatly enhanced the department’s capacity to create and maintain ongoing communication, which led to sustained partnerships within the community. The grant was paramount to the department’s process of building and maintaining true community partnerships, and it significantly accelerated the department’s timetable for implementing the partnerships.

Since being awarded the ACP grant, Longmont has funded other key initiatives with grant money. The catalyst for that funding, however, was the valuable experience the entire community—police and citizens—received by implementing the initiatives funded by the ACP grant:

- Community services coordinator
- Website information and homepage
- Spanish immersion training

- Problem-oriented policing (POP) conference
- Crime analysis and software mapping program
- Quarterly newspaper inserts
- Crime prevention through television
- Community survey
- Flattening organizational structure
- A local conference

The following sections describe the initiatives that were funded by Longmont's ACP grant and summarize the effect of each on the community.

Community Services Coordinator. Funding for the community services coordinator position allowed the department to coordinate and centralize all communications between LPD and the community. The coordinator facilitated meetings and the exchange of information between police and citizens. This position coordinates the volunteer program that saves the taxpayers approximately \$150,000 annually. Citizens enforce handicapped parking restrictions, removal of junked vehicles, and ordinances in the parks.

The coordinator developed such programs as Play-It-Safe, a program that focuses on elementary school student safety, and the Police Intern Program, which partners with local colleges. In

this program, college students who want to be police officers are trained and then patrol the streets of the community, handling mostly disorder-related issues. This has become a significant recruiting tool for the department.

The coordinator position assists with and coordinates much of the marketing for the department on a local level. The positive impact of having the coordinator on board was recognized immediately by police personnel, citizens, schools, businesses, and other organizations, including the city council, which has funded this position permanently.

Website Information and Homepage. Grant funding helped LPD develop its first homepage and, subsequently, its capacity to communicate with the community through the Internet. The components of the website include a recruitment section, a crime map, crime prevention information, police/community programs, an interactive question-and-answer section, links to other sites, and a tour of the police department. According to LPD, the website has become a good recruiting tool for the department, and it has enabled employees to answer many questions from citizens about police-related issues.

Teleminder™ System. The Teleminder™ is a community messaging system. Through multiple phone lines, the department can send out prerecorded notices of neighborhood meetings, crime

alerts, special interest information, and more. Five hundred messages can be sent in an hour; recipients can be targeted geographically. At first the department believed that information sent out should be law enforcement-related, which limited the system's use. When the grant period ended, however, the department made the Teleminder™ available to other city departments; for example, the fire department uses it for severe weather warnings. One of the most frequent users is the neighborhood group coordinator, who is closely aligned with the police department on quality-of-life issues and neighborhood revitalization.

Spanish Immersion Training. Because LPD is concerned with maintaining a positive relationship with the Hispanic population, efforts have been made to train officers to speak Spanish. Since the ACP grant expired, the department has continued to pay for the language training, which has become a high priority on the annual training schedule. As the population that speaks only Spanish continues to grow, police personnel fluent in Spanish are an essential resource.

Problem-Oriented Policing Conference. Held annually in San Diego, California, the POP conference has been a destination for Longmont police personnel for several years. ACP funds enabled the department to send not only police personnel but also 10 citizens from local businesses, neighborhood groups, and youth groups to the 1999

POP conference. The conference offered many ideas and projects to the civilians who attended, and it gave them the opportunity to spend time with police officers in an environment that was educational and social, rather than official. This particular form of partnering has continued to provide positive connections between officers and citizens. The neighborhood group leaders, with whom the police department works closely, benefit from this experience. They have taken a significant leadership role in organizing the community's neighborhoods.

Crime Analysis and Software Mapping

Program. The ACP grant allowed the department to move ahead with updated software and crime mapping. Through these upgrades, the crime analyst was able to provide operations personnel, citizens, and neighborhood groups with current crime trends and patterns and to address those trends more effectively. The mapping is also used in the department's weekly cable television show (see "Crime Prevention Through Television").

Quarterly Newspaper Inserts. One of the department's most successful communication tools, these custom-sized inserts in the local newspaper disseminate information about such topics as crime prevention, school and workplace violence, and safe gun storage. Feedback is excellent—the community has consistently found these inserts quite helpful and informative. A recent insert

focused on disorder in the city and featured the most frequently cited code violations, along with appropriate citizen responses. Because of its value to citizens, this particular insert was translated into Spanish and distributed to Spanish-speaking households. The department continues to fund the publication of these inserts.

Crime Prevention Through Television.

Longmont's weekly cable television show devoted to the local police is called "Behind the Badge." According to LPD, the show has a loyal following, and viewership has increased over the past three and a half years. The format includes a crime map, discussion of traffic hot spots, crime prevention tips, and guests who discuss the show's featured topic, along with calls from viewers. A popular segment on "Behind the Badge" is "Longmont's Most Wanted." Viewers have called in information that has led to numerous arrests. The show has had continued funding from the department and city following the ACP grant.

Community Survey. In 1996, the police department conducted a professional and scientific community survey that proved useful. The Strategic Plan 2000 called for the survey to be conducted biannually, and the ACP grant was used to conduct a new survey in 1998. This second survey was also conducted scientifically by a professional company. The new survey was expanded in scope to include not only the resident survey but also

youth and business components. The expanded survey was designed to be a baseline for future surveys conducted by police staff. Part of the survey applied to citizens who had prior personal experiences with the police and included questions about what those experiences entailed.

The results of the biannual survey have been useful in developing programs, allocating funding, and assessing the community's opinion of the department. LPD incorporates information from the survey when drafting operational plans, developing new projects, enhancing existing educational and other programs, building partnerships, proposing budgets, and allocating and deploying officers. Community surveys will continue to be part of LPD's strategy for delivering police services. The department has employed a crime, information, and research analyst who will continue to administer the surveys.

Flattening Organizational Structure. The department flattened its organization by combining two high levels (lieutenants and captains) into one (commander) and eliminating one-third of the top-level management positions. The resources saved by the restructuring were used to hire more police officers. This minimized the number of filters in the organization and gave police at each level more authority to make decisions. Chief Butler says that flattening was initially met with a good deal of resistance but has been successful.

The Our Town Conference. The department initiated a conference called Our Town for people in the community who seldom have the opportunity to attend conferences. Attendees learned cutting-edge information regarding trends in technology, business issues, the media, education, government operations, and community building.

To date, three conferences have been conducted. Organizational development experts Peter Block, John McKnight, and Patch Adams have been keynote speakers. As a result of these conferences, several new neighborhood groups have been formed and nonprofits such as Youth as Resources have been created. In addition, 250 youths from local schools have committed themselves to community service projects.

Department Observations

Department officials are aware that the implementation of community policing should be an integrated, systematic approach and that any new program will have systemwide impact. Thus, the department ensures that new programs conform to its community policing philosophy and fit successfully within its management systems.

"Our ongoing challenge," says Chief Butler, "will be shifting some of the responsibility of public

safety from the police to the community, as well as the power to deal with related issues responsibly."

Butler goes on to say that the department needs to "give people a chance to create their part of that vision. Create an environment that gets people talking on their own and with each other. Encourage disagreement. Give people a voice." But he also says it is important to "remind them that their voice comes at a cost. The cost for people to have a voice revolves around agenda. Their agenda must be about the organization and/or the community and not about themselves."

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Police Chief Michael Butler

Panel Commentary

Many of the grants and programs the panel has evaluated asked for monetary support to initiate or complete a strategic planning process. In contrast,

LPD requested and received ACP grant support several years after completion of its strategic plan. This phased support of analysis, implementation, and possible expansion of strategic goals is a worthwhile model. Strategic planning is the cornerstone of agency progress; an agency should not wait for a funding opportunity before initiating the strategic planning process.

LPD's strategic planning process is remarkable for its inclusion of community and business leaders in site visits and for reporting back to the department as a whole. Ongoing modification of the plan through outside retreats demonstrates the department's commitment to process. In fact, paying attention to process is an underappreciated skill in law enforcement, and some departments have languished for years as a result.

Using a grant to fund a full-time position is generally a risky proposition. Invariably, there are startup losses in time and energy. There is also the possibility that the program will not meet basic goals before the position can be funded again via a continuing grant or transferred to a general fund or other budget line item. In the case of Longmont's community services coordinator, however, this risk paid off. Not only did the department advance important strategic goals, but the success of the program prompted the city council to fund the position permanently. This outcome (which unfortunately remains more the exception

than the rule) reinforces the power of a clearly articulated vision of both the objective and the plan for implementation.

The use of the Teleminder™ system for communicating messages to community members is noteworthy. While these automated outdialing systems are used by large agencies under a variety of trade names, it is unusual to find an agency the size of LPD deploying such a system. Moreover, these systems tend to be used by

public safety agencies for emergency management and mobilization. The use of these systems to communicate with the community maximizes their value, particularly when one considers that they are idle for most of any given day.

Longmont's work is an excellent example of how purposeful leadership combined with public funding can bring about change within an organization that, without the grant, would not be motivated or prepared for the change immediately or quickly.

Chief Butler's attention to integration of services and organizational structure demonstrates a fundamental understanding of how these aspects of a police department are related and how they affect the work of each officer. Officers will work more willingly and effectively in the community if behavior inside the department serves as a model of the behavior they are expected to display outside the department.