

WINDSOR:

A New Partnership Between Law Enforcement and Citizens

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The Advancing Community Policing Grant

Background

The Windsor Police Department sought the Advancing Community Policing (ACP) grant to establish a departmentwide community policing focus and to initiate a promotional campaign to tell citizens about those efforts. When the department applied for the grant, it was still operating primarily under traditional policing principles.

Chief of Police Kevin Searles says applying for the grant forced the department to talk about where it wanted to go as an organization and

how community policing fit in. The bottom line, according to Chief Searles, was an agreement that community policing needed to be integrated into the entire department and throughout the town to get everyone involved, building strong relationships in the process.

The Project

Several methods were used to kick off the organizational transformation that evolved under the grant:

- Strategic planning
- Community relations
- Increased communication

- Neighborhood Watch program
- Decentralization and accountability

Strategic Planning. A strategic plan was developed to identify recommendations for successfully implementing community policing. Surveys were conducted with Windsor police officers and the community as part of the planning process. The strategic plan made programmatic and implementation suggestions that helped guide the department in the change process. A key component of the planning process was the use of a Community Policing Steering Committee that comprised a cross section of the department. After a series of developmental sessions, this group met with the department's supervisory staff and union officials to share its vision and discuss the next steps.

Community Relations. Grant funds were used to hire a community relations coordinator to coordinate and monitor ACP grant activities. Those duties included documenting the process, supporting Neighborhood Watch meetings, providing area statistics for police, documenting concerns and problems, alerting sergeants to any new concerns, and creating crime prevention/safety awareness materials for public use.

Increased Communication. The Windsor Police Department was committed to open dialogue with the community. Several communications tools were developed with grant resources to help build internal and external relationships.

A website—www.windsorpolice.com—was developed by Officer Gerry Bagley, the union president of the department. Officer Bagley is a department veteran who has helped build a strong alliance between the police union and management to support community policing. The website is interactive, includes an abbreviated version of the dispatch log (updated daily), and answers questions.

A weekly television show called “On the Beat with the Windsor Police Department” covers topics of interest to the community. One segment followed a new recruit as he went through the police academy. Another show featured the command staff responding to citizens' questions in an “open mike” format.

The Citizens Police Academy is a 12-week course for local residents that meets one night each week and gives residents an inside look at the department's operations.

Neighborhood Watch Program. The Neighborhood Watch program has been revitalized after a hiatus of several years. Reaching out to a larger section of the community, the program has linked organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Windsor Realtors, Meals-on-Wheels, senior centers, civic organizations, religious groups, and neighborhood clusters. Reducing crime is a primary focus of the community network, as is improving the quality of life. Helping residents with such quality-of-life issues as noise, potholes, and traffic problems results in obvious benefits to the residents. The most important benefit from addressing these issues is that residents get to see officers working on issues that are important to them. This makes residents more likely to call police with tips, general information, and reports of suspicious activity.

With the increase in foot patrols, officers are more visible and approachable. Two members of the department are assigned to each Neighborhood Watch group to provide continuity and build relationships. Assigning all personnel to watch groups is the heart of the new department's policy. Everyone learns firsthand about customer service, ownership, and accountability. The department

promotes the belief that an officer is more effective when he or she has active relationships in the community. Officers now view every resident in town as a potential source of information. The department plans to make the sharing of information a two-way process by providing information to citizens via its website, email, and phone trees.

Decentralization and Accountability. The Windsor Police Department split the town into two major districts: north and south. A captain has complete responsibility for the activity in each district. The captains direct the work of all personnel in their respective regions. All command staff are evaluated on problem solving, crime rates, and citizens’ perception of safety (obtained through survey results in their district).

Department Observations

The ACP grant gave the Windsor Police Department the opportunity and resources to effect changes that probably would not have been possible without that support. The grant added a motivating factor, presented a vehicle for change, and produced a sense of commitment. The department is in the early stages of internal implementation and must still build a philosophical and operational bridge to the officers on the beat, not all of whom have embraced the changes.

Chief Searles says that “the real benefit of the grant was that it forced us to think about this whole set of issues and it kept us on track, because we had made a commitment.” But he adds that the process was not without its challenges, especially because many officers were reluctant to embrace the notion of community policing. “Part of the problem was our administrative staff performed poorly in terms of communicating clearly what our vision was and what we were trying to accomplish.” The department learned it is a mistake to have a few community policing “specialists”—everyone in the department must be focused on community policing.

Windsor’s community policing philosophy has evolved to incorporate four strategies:

- Making sure that citizens feel safe at all times
- Providing citizens with customer service
- Doing good police work
- Ensuring the long-term economic viability of the town

Chief Searles says that the last point is important because “you don’t get budgets approved if the town is hurting, because people don’t want their

WINDSOR POLICE DEPARTMENT

LOCATION: WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT

CHIEF: KEVIN SEARLES

CONTACT: WWW.WINDSORPOLICE.COM

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

CATEGORY: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

AMOUNT FUNDED: \$241,173

SITE VISIT: FEBRUARY 7, 2001

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Windsor, Connecticut is located in the Hartford capital area, along the Connecticut and Farmington Rivers. Windsor is 91 miles south of Boston, 106 miles from New York City, and has 28,237 residents over 29.63 square miles. The population is 62.9 percent white, 26.7 percent black, 5.0 percent Hispanic,

3.1 percent Asian and 2.3 percent other.* One-third of more than 1,200 businesses in town is connected with the service industry. The Windsor Police Department is a small department, with 56 sworn and 10 civilian employees.

* U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

taxes going up. So it all works together—cops working in partnership with the community to solve problems. It works.”

Officer Bagley says the police union has been supportive of the community policing efforts because they have proved so effective. He observes that early efforts already have made a difference, and he is looking forward to the future: “By getting into the neighborhood and walking it with residents, our experience has shown a much better understanding of the neighborhood by the officer, as well as greatly improved citizen input. Officers will now have detailed information about criminal activity in the neighborhood, so citizens will have a

more accurate view and therefore an improved perception of public safety.”

Panel Commentary

Two days of training for each department member is a powerful start for a small department. It establishes a common language, reinforces the philosophy and department commitment in a short time, and builds skills for all who are interested.

The website is well done and provides services that larger departments would find helpful to

review. It has a personal feel, yet is professional at the same time. The feedback section is important, because it lets residents know the department is working on their concerns. The townwide referral system and intranet tracking system are also well done and should be shared with other departments. The photo gallery included on the website puts a friendly face on the department.

The department made a smart observation that success depends on everyone having community policing responsibility, not just a few people. That attitude and the department’s philosophy are apparent in the images and features on its website.