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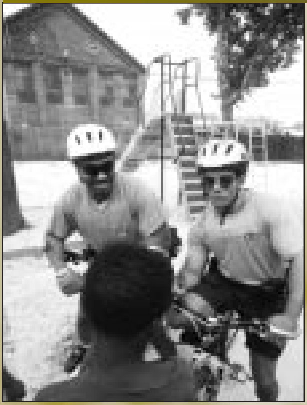
Problem Solving in Practice:

Implementing Community Policing in Chicago



research report

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Problem Solving in Practice:
Implementing Community Policing in Chicago

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Summary

The Chicago Police Department has adopted a problem-solving approach to crime and disorder—the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS)—as part of a move toward community-oriented policing. With more than 16,600 employees, Chicago's police department is the second largest in the United States, serving nearly 3 million people and responding to calls over a 225-square-mile area. The size and complexity of the CAPS initiative have generated significant changes in the department's structure and goals during a multiyear implementation effort. NIJ has funded a long-term evaluation of this organizational transition. This report presents one aspect of the NIJ evaluation—the findings of a study conducted in a small sample of beats to determine *how* Chicago's problem-solving model has actually been implemented. It is hoped this report will serve as a resource for police and civil leaders who are interested in moving beyond the rhetoric of community policing and into the reality of making it work.

Implementation studies are important because the policing field is littered with failed efforts to change police organizations. Translating the abstract concepts of community policing into day-to-day steps that police officers can follow is complicated, and motivating officers to follow those practical instructions is difficult. It is just as difficult to rebuild the collective efficacy of communities that have lost it and to involve residents of poor and previously disenfranchised neighborhoods in partnerships with the police. The Chicago study examines such issues in detail, isolating some of the factors that explain implementation success and failure.

The study beats were selected to reflect the diversity of the city and varied greatly in their level of community involvement and their ability to respond to local problems. To assess the capacity of these areas to help themselves through problem solving, residents were surveyed, neighborhood meetings were observed, and activists were interviewed. The study found that poor and internally divided beats experienced greater difficulty in translating their aspirations into practice than did better-off and racially homogeneous areas. Residents of higher capacity areas were better at solving their own problems and experienced far

fewer problems, turned out in greater numbers for beat meetings, and were more likely to become involved in a broad array of problem-solving efforts; also, neighborhood activists in these areas more accurately reflected the racial and class composition of the community.

Assessments based on interviews with police of all ranks, observing officers at work, attending staff meetings, studying police records, and interviewing knowledgeable individuals indicated widely varying implementation of problem solving on the police side—some beats fielded excellent programs, and others made little progress. The study data were used to rank the beats in terms of how closely their activities corresponded to the department's plan.

The evaluation found that the factor most closely associated with successful program implementation was effective leadership, particularly the leadership of beat sergeants. Influence on problem solving diminished as rank increased—the closer managers were to the field, the more their leadership counted. Although district commanders played an important legitimizing role by providing visible support for the program, program acceptance was more varied at levels below them. The best beat sergeants pushed their officers to focus on the key problems, stressed problem solving, clarified the importance of following department protocols, held productive police beat meetings, and encouraged innovative thinking and actions among team members. Moreover, the best sergeants expected their officers to support the program and worked hard to involve individuals in the community and to respond to their concerns. They kept track of issues raised at beat meetings and ensured that something was done about them.

In this study, police efforts to involve the community in problem solving were assessed independently of their success because the beats varied significantly in their capacity to become organized and involved. No direct association was found between community capacity and program implementation. In addition, survey-based assessments of police service appeared to be unrelated to the actual quality of policing, as observed in the field.

Among the recommendations for enhancing program implementation is more training for beat officers, who find it difficult to translate the abstract concept of problem solving into their daily routines. Chicago is also typical in needing to find ways to become more creative in its problem-solving efforts by learning from its own experiences and developing mechanisms (e.g., "knowledge bases" of successful practice) to document recurring problems and effective solutions. The city needs to develop practical ways to measure and monitor the problem-solving efforts of units, teams, and individual officers and to assess their effectiveness. In addition, the department needs to develop a leadership cadre that effectively supports community-oriented problem solving from the level of street sergeants to the very top of the organization, where managers must provide vision for the program and define the extent to which community-oriented work will be a central mission.

This report first summarizes Chicago's community-oriented program and then describes the problem-solving roles of both citizens and police. It identifies some important obstacles affecting both citizen involvement in and police commitment to the program and presents general strategies for implementing a problem-solving approach based on the Chicago observations. Additional details about Chicago's problem-solving program and the findings of this research may be found in the books and articles listed on page 34.

Chicago's Problem-Solving Model

The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy involves a significant expansion of the police mandate. In Chicago's problem-solving model for policing, a "problem" is defined as a group of related incidents or an ongoing situation that concerns a significant portion of those who live or work in a particular area. A problem is also persistent—it is unlikely to disappear without active intervention of some magnitude—and must potentially be solved using police and community resources, because not everything is within their power. A problem need not be a serious criminal matter. Although dealing with crime remains at the heart of the police mission, it was envisioned from the beginning that the police mandate would coordinate responses to a broad range of community concerns, including social disorder, municipal service problems, and code enforcement matters previously handled by civil courts. Frequently, problems are not legal offenses at all and can range from noise to people repairing their cars at the curb to the dilapidated condition of many of the city's modest bungalows.

To implement problem solving, police and neighborhood residents were trained to handle problems using a five-step process:

1. *Identify* problems and prioritize them incorporating community input.
2. *Analyze* information about offenders, victims, and crime locations.
3. *Design* strategies that address the chronic character of priority problems by thinking "outside the box" of traditional police enforcement tactics and using new resources that were developed by the city to support problem-solving efforts.
4. *Implement* the strategies, a step requiring special skill and effort by the community, police, and other city departments as they attempt to actually put plans in motion.
5. *Evaluate* effectiveness through self-assessments to determine how well the plan has been carried out and what good has been accomplished.

In Chicago, important aspects of the police organization were reengineered to support problem solving. The patrol division was reorganized, and turf-based teams of officers were trained to deal with problems in their areas. The 911 system was redesigned to ensure that the new teams could answer most calls for service within their designated beats. The department also changed its supervision system to encourage teamwork among beat officers. Beat sergeants were responsible for coordinating their efforts across the 24-hour clock. One mechanism for doing so was beat team meetings that brought together all of the officers serving the area on all watches. Beat sergeants, in turn, reported to a lieutenant charged with coordinating their projects across a larger geographical area.

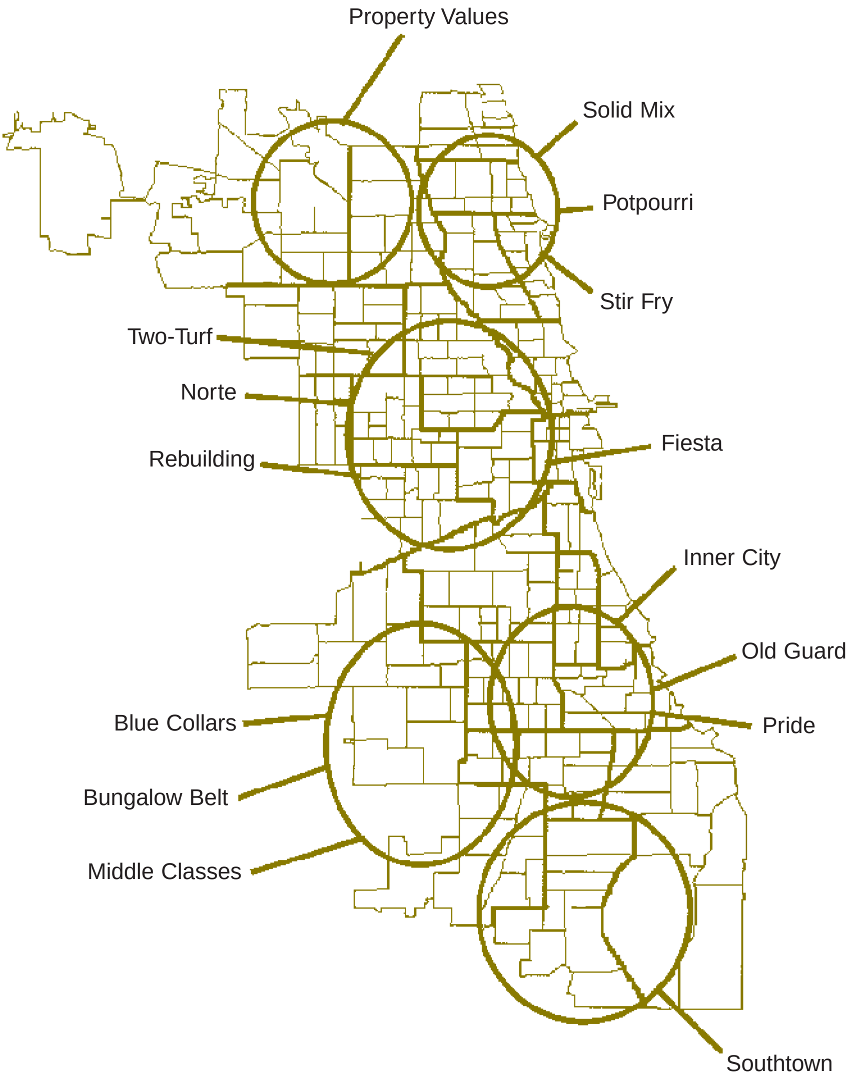
The views of the community were represented in two ways: through district-level advisory committees where policies and strategies were discussed with commanders, and through monthly community meetings held in every beat. During 1998, nearly 6,000 people attended these meetings every month. A new office set up in city hall to encourage participation and to coordinate the efforts of district-level committees mounted a marketing campaign to spread program awareness and to spark involvement in the problem-solving effort. Priority problems identified by neighborhood residents were to be incorporated into formal beat plans drawn up by the officers serving each area. Officers had access to all of the city's departments to deal with service problems, and could quickly mobilize services ranging from car tows to trash pickups. This structure enabled officers to respond effectively to problems they do not ordinarily handle and for which they are not traditionally equipped.

Another important feature of Chicago's problem-solving infrastructure was training for both neighborhood residents and police. Residents were expected to take an active role as partners with the police and on their own. Without training, both groups could have reverted to their old expectations and habits, and might not have made effective use of the new problem-solving resources created for the program.

The Neighborhoods and Problem Solving

To examine the implementation of problem solving in Chicago, 15 police beats were selected for detailed study. Their general locations are depicted in figure 1, which identifies them by names devised to reflect their distinctive character. The selection of beats was based on demographic data with no prior knowledge of the problem-solving involvement of either residents or police. The beats (which ranged from 4,000 to 21,000 in population) represented many of the conditions and lifestyles common in Chicago. The populations of some beats were predominately white, in others they were mostly Latino or black, and in others they were extremely diverse. Some beats were crowded with apartments; in others, single-family homes prevailed. Residents in some beats were well off; in others, they were desperately poor. The small number of beats selected could not constitute a representative "sample" of the city; in fact, beats from relatively well-off parts of town were deliberately avoided in order to focus efforts on places facing difficult problems. The research team spent a great deal of time in each area observing neighborhood conditions, riding with

Figure 1: Problem-Solving Study Beats in Chicago


Property Values
Solid Mix
Potpourri
Stir Fry
Two-Turf
Norte
Rebuilding
Fiesta
Inner City
Old Guard
Pride
Blue Collars
Bungalow Belt
Middle Classes
Southtown

police, examining police files, attending community meetings, and interviewing community leaders. A survey was conducted among residents, and substantial quantitative data were collected from police and other government sources.

One goal of the study was to assess the beats' capacity to deal with local problems on their own. The study found that the communities' "homegrown" capacity for self-defense largely mirrored the pattern of privilege and privation that characterizes American society in general. Poor and internally divided beats found it more difficult to translate their aspirations into practice, while relatively better-off and racially homogeneous areas solved their own problems more effectively and experienced far fewer problems.

Measures of problem-solving capacity

Neighborhood problem-solving capacity was measured along three dimensions: individual, collective, and political.

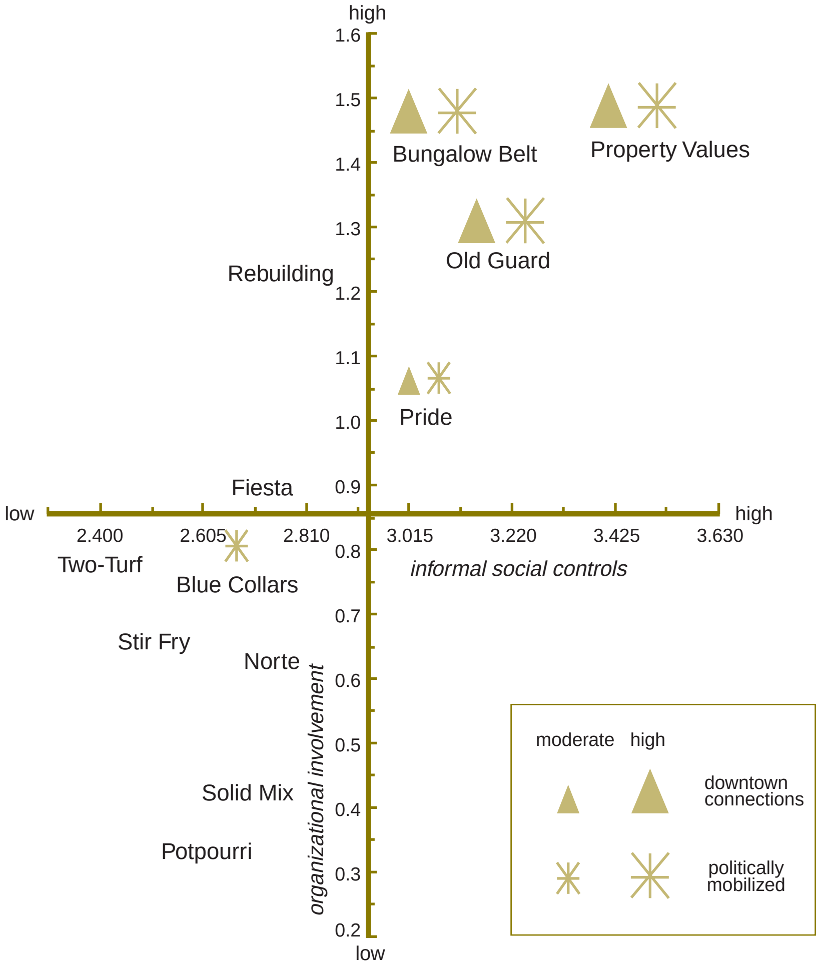
Individual. The individual component of capacity is indicated by the strength of informal social control in each beat. One important problem-solving asset enjoyed by some communities but in short supply elsewhere is a tradition of residents actively intervening to safeguard local norms when they are threatened. This willingness of individuals to step forward and challenge violators is one of the principal ways that communities maintain order on their own initiative. Sampson et al. stress the importance of informal mechanisms by which communities can "realize the common values of residents" because it is apparent that many neighborhoods are unable to safeguard norms relating to public behavior even when they are supported by a large majority of individual residents.[1] The informal social control measures used in this study were adapted from their research. The survey questions probed respondents' perceptions of how likely it would be for their neighbors to intervene if a fight occurred in front of their house, if children were spray-painting graffiti on a local building, and if a teenager were harassing a senior citizen. Overall, 83 percent thought their neighbors would be likely to intervene to protect a senior citizen, while only 50 percent thought their neighbors would intervene to stop a fight.

Collective. The collective component of neighborhood capacity is indicated by the density of local organizational life in each beat. Organizations enable individuals to share, accumulate, and prioritize their concerns; engage in constructive debate over what to do about them; and coordinate their own efforts to deal with concerns at the top of the agenda. Organizations institutionalize individual effort—by recruiting new participants while keeping to the old agenda, they can sustain problem solving when their members tire, retire, or turn to other interests. They can turn people out for events when the weather is bad. The Chicago study examined the extent of resident involvement in block watches and neighborhood patrols, community organizations and block clubs, parent-teacher associations and local school councils, and local churches (an important force in many black areas). Overall, 58 percent of the households surveyed were involved with at least one such organization (mostly local churches).

Political. The political aspect of community capacity is reflected in residents' ability to extract resources from the outside world. While problem-oriented policing promotes the image of communities "pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps," in many areas residents lack the capacity to deal with their most pressing problems on their own. In the Chicago study, some beats were closely bound to city- or metropolitan area-wide institutions that could deliver the services and money required to tackle local problems. Beats with strong downtown connections also had the capacity to influence how government programs and private development efforts were implemented in their areas. Each beat was rated "high," "moderate," or "low" on this dimension on the basis of the field research. Also assessed was the political capacity of each beat in the electoral domain—a factor that historically helps get things done in Chicago. Two properties of political capacity were measured: election turnout rates and responses to the neighborhood survey indicating that neighbors would be likely to organize to keep their local police station open if budget cuts threatened to shut it down.

These three components could be incorporated into a single numerical measure of the problem-solving capacity of each beat because they turned out to be so tightly intertwined that there was no practical utility in examining them separately. Generally, the same beats shared the advantages of strong organizations, effective informal social controls, and political influence. This is illustrated in figure 2, which plots the configuration of the 12 beats that could be surveyed along all 3 dimensions of community problem-solving capacity.

Figure 2: Problem-Solving Capacity: Informal Social Controls, Organizational Involvement, and Political Capacity



Social and economic factors

Community problem-solving capacity was strongly rooted in the social and economic makeup of the study areas. Choices such as helping out, joining up, and turning out to vote were heavily structured by race and class. Problem-solving capacity was strongly linked to affluence. It was greater in police beats dominated by homeowners and higher income households, and where people lived in single-family homes as married couples and two-parent families. Property Values, the most affluent beat, scored the highest on every measure of community capacity. A picturesque neighborhood of large houses, this area is home to many top city administrators and political leaders; its beat meetings were held in the clubhouse of a golf course. Older, long-term residents predominated in self-regulating and well-organized areas like Bungalow Belt (home to white city workers) and Old Guard (a middle-class, black community). Latinos (Mexican-Americans in Fiesta, Puerto Ricans in Norte, and both groups in Two-Turf) were at a disadvantage compared with either whites or blacks. Community capacity was also higher in racially homogeneous areas, including as many black as predominately white beats, and it was weaker in diverse places. Of the beats shown in figure 2, those highest in homogeneity were Pride, Old Guard, and Rebuilding (all black), and Bungalow Belt and Property Values (all white).

Not surprisingly, community capacity was strongly linked to the urban ills that have sparked interest in problem-solving policing. Residents of high-capacity beats reported far fewer problems than their counterparts, and they were less fearful of neighborhood crime. In general, residents of black beats cited drug-related problems in the survey; those in predominately Latino areas reported gang-related problems; and residents in predominately white areas were most concerned about property crime and traffic-related issues. The extent of neighborhood physical decay was strongly linked to income and other measures of affluence. Residents of the three most racially diverse beats identified a more divergent set of problems, but the second most frequently cited problem in each area fell in the social disorder category. Residents of Norte and Rebuilding were concerned about gentrification; residents of Bungalow Belt and Blue Collars were worried about neighborhood racial transition. And residents of low-capacity beats had significantly more negative views of the police, which served as a warning that mounting an effective program might be difficult.

The survey included three questions about the quality of police service in the community. Residents were asked about the responsiveness of the police to community concerns, whether police were dealing with problems of real concern to residents, and how good a job police were doing in working with residents to solve local problems. Among the 12 beats, only 2 gave police at least an average rating of “good” on these items. They were the only two well-off, predominately white beats: Property Values and Bungalow Belt. Three Latino areas (Two-Turf, Fiesta, and Norte) gave police the least favorable rating.

Residents of better-off beats were more heavily involved in CAPS as well. Attendance at beat community meetings was higher in high-capacity areas. Pride ranked first, followed by Bungalow Belt and Old Guard. Surveys of meeting participants found that those from high-capacity beats were more likely to become actively involved in problem solving. Property Values ranked highest on this measure, and Fiesta ranked lowest. A source of the linkage between capacity and both meeting attendance and problem solving by residents was the role played by community organizations. Organized residents attended more faithfully and were more involved in getting things done, while residents who were not networked within the community attended fitfully and did not contribute much.

High-capacity beats were also more fully represented in the city’s program; those who attended beat meetings there more closely matched the demographic complexion of the area. In low-capacity areas, meeting attendees overrepresented the best-off elements of the community, as measured by income, education, and home ownership, and participants came from isolated pockets of the beat. Beat meetings in Two-Turf (Latino) and Inner City (the poorest black community in the study) were attended almost exclusively by the areas’ relatively few homeowners. Meetings in high-capacity areas were also more representative in the sense that participants were linked to other residents through the web of community organizations active there.

Challenges to community policing effectiveness

The study findings raise two challenges to Chicago's community policing program and, perhaps, to others around the country. The first is whether the program will be able to effectively help worse-off areas become better off, because many are concerned that community policing will work best—and perhaps only work at all—in stable, home-owning, "pro-police" neighborhoods. The second is whether community policing can function effectively in racially diverse communities, where residents may point fingers at each other over the area's problems.

Low- versus high-capacity areas. The risk that a problem-solving approach to policing might principally assist better-off neighborhoods in becoming even better off is a real one. Factors that placed these neighborhoods in the high-capacity category also made them easy venues for community-oriented police work. An officer working in Bungalow Belt described his as "the perfect CAPS beat" in reference to its family orientation, concern about property values, strong organizations, and high turnout (averaging more than 100 residents each month) at beat meetings. Based on beat surveys, residents of high-capacity beats also identified more closely with the police; these beats included the two largely middle-class black communities (Pride and Old Guard). Therefore, the challenge facing community policing is to implement an effective program in low-capacity areas. Doing so would help worse-off areas become better off. It would also speak to the concerns of Chicagoans who are most disaffected from the police and are most likely to doubt their responsiveness to the community.

Among those in the worse-off category were residents of Stir Fry, an area populated nearly evenly by whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians. Stir Fry's organizational life stood at almost zero. In terms of perceived willingness to come to the aid of a senior citizen, Stir Fry ranked last, and only two beats ranked below it in willingness to challenge spray-painting vandals. The beat population was 93 percent rental, and

62 percent of survey respondents had lived there less than 5 years. All 6,000 of the beat's residents lived in a 4- by 5-block area. Homeless shelters, service centers, halfway houses, and single-room occupancy hotels were abundant, drawing needy people like magnets. People roamed the streets day and night, including male and female prostitutes and their pimps, panhandlers, "bag ladies" and their male counterparts, runaways, peddlers, drunks, and street drug dealers. Groups of older men loitered in front of convenience stores selling loose cigarettes and small bottles of liquor, and refuse from the area's many fast-food outlets littered the sidewalks. Public urination and defecation also were significant problems. Stir Fry led the 15 study beats in the rate at which police were dispatched to handle disturbances and non-crime matters, including homeless people sleeping in vacant lots, parks, and public facilities. The area needed help, but the area's alderman was opposed to community policing, and (as described below) the police failed to implement the program there.

Racially diverse areas. Diversity presents another challenge to community policing. Racially and ethnically homogeneous areas found it easier to become organized, and more people in such areas reported that their neighbors were willing to intervene to safeguard social norms when threatened. At beat meetings, residents were comfortable with attributing their crime problems to nameless "outsiders." All of the areas with significant community capacity were primarily homogeneous in composition, including both white and black beats. In diverse communities, suspicion and fear may divide an area along race, class, and lifestyle lines. Diversity makes it easier to blame others and abdicate personal responsibility for taking constructive action. Groups may find themselves battling each other over local priorities and access to resources. In diverse areas, the sites at which meetings were held in the beat determined which groups showed up. Beat meetings rarely represented the population as a whole in these areas; they were usually dominated by the better-off faction, and decisions about where to meet were often the subject of hot rhetoric. In beats like Norte and Rebuilding, police risked being drawn into battles over gentrification. In Stir Fry, they were caught between warring factions of gentrifiers and supporters of the status quo, with the latter convinced that community policing was part of a plot by city hall to make war on the disadvantaged. Police are pressed to choose sides in diverse areas, and their efforts threaten to become politicized.

The impact of diversity on community capacity was illustrated in Blue Collars. Although this study area had many fundamentals in its favor, it did not register high levels of involvement or intervention. Blue Collars, an area of neat, single-family homes and two-family duplexes, was home to a significant number of city workers with stable, middle-income jobs. In terms of income, it ranked in the top quarter of all beats in the city. Compared with similar beats, however, Blue Collars was much less organized and politically mobilized. The area exercised a lower level of informal social control than it should have exercised because racial transition within the community had upset existing relationships and discouraged the maintenance of beatwide alliances and mutual support. Newly arrived Latino residents were much less involved in local organizations, and the organizations that survived served shrunken, ethnically homogeneous parts of the beat. Residents did not know their new neighbors and were not sure that they would intervene if things went wrong. The two groups identified quite different concerns. Newcomers were substantially less likely to think they were receiving adequate service from the police, and they were less optimistic about how well community policing had progressed in the area. White residents were concerned about the area's newly visible graffiti, which they read as signaling an emerging gang problem associated with neighborhood change.

It is possible, however, for police to provide a bridging link in diverse communities. Beat meetings and district advisory committees can bring together community members in a regular, safe, public forum where participants' concerns can be aired and their common interests recognized, perhaps for the first time. Chicago's program provides an incentive for cooperation because a clear community voice can make a more credible claim for attention from the police and their partner agencies. Residents united around a common set of problems are able to leverage more resources than they can leverage by speaking separately. Finally, as compared with many other venues where low-visibility policies are made and acted upon, beat officers can be expected to operate in a relatively law- and rule-bound fashion.

They are less free than politicians or investors to decide matters on the basis of their personal views. With proper mechanisms for supervision and accountability in place, they should be able to safeguard the rights of all citizens, and such safeguards will help them find common ground for taking action.

Police Problem Solving

The study beats were also a laboratory for evaluating how well problem solving actually was being implemented. They were chosen on the basis of their demography, location, and residential character rather than on the basis of any advance knowledge of policing there. Among the 15 beats examined, 4 were judged to be doing an excellent job, 5 were fielding reasonable programs, 2 were struggling to make the grade, and 4 had failed to implement much problem solving at all. Their rankings were based on assessments of five program dimensions: management actions at the district level, supervisory work conducted by beat team sergeants, problem-solving efforts of beat officers, officers' attempts to involve the community, and the formal beat plans drawn up reflecting (in theory) the involvement or oversight of all participants. Each of the five assessments involved rating performance on several specific program elements as excellent, passing, or failing. Summing the specific ratings to form scores for each of the five dimensions, and then aggregating them in a summary index, resulted in a ranking of the beats in terms of the extent of program implementation in each.

Rating the beats

The study beat ratings were based on personal interviews with officers, beat team leaders, Neighborhood Relations sergeants, district administrative managers, and commanders. Members of the evaluation staff also went on patrol with beat officers, and made independent observations of each area. They attended community gatherings, meetings of beat team members, and monthly district advisory committee meetings. Also, they inspected the paperwork on file in the district stations and attended administrative meetings; interviewed business operators, local activists, and organization leaders; and attended neighborhood meetings. Observers also attended meetings in which headquarters personnel reviewed the district's action plans. Field work was guided by outlines detailing information that would be required later. Observers' detailed notes were reviewed centrally by several readers, who used them to rate the status of each program element in each beat. Ratings were then reviewed again by the entire evaluation staff, and a consensus was reached about the three-point rating of each beat on each program element. Summary scores were then calculated combining the specific elements of each of the five evaluative dimensions. The following descriptions of each of the five dimensions illustrate the important organizational arrangements involved in fielding a comprehensive community policing program.

District management. Assessing district management involved rating the extent to which the commanders understood the department's philosophy and new protocols. Those earning a high score on this factor understood that significant changes were called for in department operations; that the city's goal was to create partnerships with community residents and other city agencies; that information sharing with the community is a "two-way street"; and that problem-solving strategies needed to be developed jointly with their new partners. Those who received a low score mostly thought CAPS was a "warm and fuzzy" public relations program designed to make civilians feel better about the police. The commanders were also rated on the extent to which they provided vocal support for the program when working with their officers and in public. The study probed whether the lieutenants who served on the management team actively reviewed beat plans, provided feedback on them, and visibly supervised their beat team sergeants. Districts received higher ratings where lieutenants attended beat team meetings, made recommendations or helped their sergeants obtain needed resources, requested updates on problems or on the success of strategies, and were knowledgeable about what was going on in the beats.

Team sergeants. The leadership provided by beat team sergeants was assessed based on whether they understood the department's philosophy and new protocols, provided vocal support for the program, and expressed enthusiasm about the program when working with their officers and in public. Sergeants who fared poorly on this measure feared letting the community help set police priorities and thought that community policing was a public relations gimmick. They belittled the program or announced that it was not doing any good and could never work. Genuinely enthusiastic beat sergeants were easy to spot at beat team and community meetings and around the station house. They liked their new assignment, cared about doing a good job, and appreciated the new tools and resources at their disposal. Low-rated sergeants were unconvinced that the program offered much and felt harried by their new responsibilities. The extent to which the sergeants encouraged compliance with problem-solving procedures and paperwork was also rated. Sergeants in lower rated beats felt harassed by paperwork and were unwilling to impose the required forms on their officers. Sergeants near the top of the rating scale encouraged their officers to engage in specific problem-solving tasks using the department's analysis model. They steered officers in this direction and gave them positive feedback when they made progress, most visibly at beat team meetings. Low-rated sergeants mostly thought that the problem-solving model was too complicated to actually use in practice. Sergeants were also rated on their ability to keep their records in good order, motivate their officers to keep their beat planners (binders containing information about the area) up to date, and encourage their officers to provide progress reports on the problems identified in the beat plan.

In addition, sergeants were assessed on whether they encouraged their officers to target the priorities established in the beat plan. In beats receiving a high score, sergeants motivated their officers to pay attention to the priority problems identified there. This included calling for reports about what was being done about official priorities at beat team meetings and regularly exhorting officers to follow up on them. Part of the problem-solving package was the notion that beat policing is a team activity that runs around the clock. Beat team meetings were held to bring together officers from all shifts to identify priority problems and develop strategies for addressing them. Officers in low-ranked beats often did not know what the official priorities were and went on patrol without much guidance from their supervisors. Finally, sergeants were rated by the productivity of their beat team meetings. Productive team meetings were well attended and energetic, and virtually everyone present played an active role. Plans were made and debated, and officers felt free to add or critique ideas. Sometimes the experiences of other beats were discussed.

Beat officers. Beat team officers' activities were rated along three dimensions. The first was whether they actually worked on the problems identified as priorities for their beats. Under CAPS, each beat team was expected to choose two to four issues on which to focus their problem-solving energies. These were to be identified in their beat plans. The study examined whether officers actually worked on those priority problems in a consistent or sustained fashion. For example, police in one beat identified seven priority problems; of these, six were successfully resolved (by their criteria), and records clearly tracked how they were handled and the extra resources required to do so. In another beat, officers closed three of the beat's five formally identified priority problems within a year. At team meetings, virtually every officer became involved in debates over how best to address these issues.

In terms of the problem-solving model, while all beat officers had been trained to analyze crime and use the five-step process adopted by the department, the study team held them to a fairly loose standard in assessing their problem-solving practices. Consideration was given to the following: Was there any deliberation following problem identification, or did officers just act instinctively? Did officers talk over potential strategies? Was there evidence that they assessed their progress or made midcourse corrections during their efforts? In one area, self-assessment occurred during meetings that officers held regularly with leaders of a local crime watch group. They discussed local problems and strategies for coping with them that could be fielded by both police and the group on its own. In another area, the day-watch beat officer (on this shift they worked alone in safer areas) kept careful records in his beat binder and acted quickly when the city attorney assigned a prosecutor to assist officers in his district. He had good records on troubled buildings in his beat, several of which were associated with problems formally identified as priority issues. The two quickly developed a plan for evicting bad tenants in some troubled buildings and for demolishing an abandoned building.

The third factor rated was whether beat officers were actually employing any creative—or at least nontraditional—strategies for solving problems. This was one of the aspects of the new program that did not surface often. Most beat teams retained traditional tactics, including patrolling, ticketing, and making arrests. Some of the innovations involved communicating and working with new civilian partners, including school principals and local merchants. Teams also promoted citizens' efforts, including "positive loitering" projects and neighborhood marches. In one beat, police coordinated the efforts of the alderman, real estate developers, members of the local school council, and beat residents to solve one problem.

Community involvement. Beat teams were rated on their efforts to involve the community, and the productivity of each beat's community meetings was also assessed. The teams were scored as being productive if interchanges regularly occurred between police and residents regarding beat problems and what was to be done about them. Consideration was given to whether police reported back to residents on the status of problems discussed at previous meetings or on their efforts to do something about them. In one area, the beat sergeant felt that making community meetings "pay off" was the best way to encourage participation, so officers kept careful track of each problem raised at beat community meetings. They were discussed individually at beat team meetings that were held immediately afterward, and action plans were agreed upon. At each beat community meeting, team members then reported back on what they had done about the problems discussed at the last meeting and their current status.

Consideration was also given to whether officers engaged in any community outreach efforts, including attempts to inform the public about beat community meetings or other events. Instances in which they took the initiative to develop a good relationship with community residents were noted. In one area, officers visited the homes of recent burglary victims and encouraged them to attend beat community meetings. In another, officers and a group of residents discussed how to improve attendance at beat community meetings, eventually deciding to try a new location that would be more accessible to many residents (and attendance increased). In a third, police included an active and knowledgeable civilian in the team's police-only meetings. In another diverse area, police worked hard to ensure that good translators (not just someone present who would volunteer) were available for beat meetings. It is important to note that police *efforts* to involve the community in problem solving were assessed independently of their success because, as noted above, the beats varied significantly in their latent capacity to become organized and involved.

The study rated whether police involved residents in some way in attempting to solve a problem. This was one of the most sophisticated elements of Chicago's problem-solving program and was rarely observed. Although evidence of working partnerships was sparse, some precursors to joint police-community action were uncovered. In one area, residents and police together organized marches against street prostitution. In another, police worked closely with residents to address problems with a building owned by an absentee slumlord. They gathered crime data and reports about specific problems in the building, worked with the city inspector, and worked to see the slumlord convicted and subsequently serve several weeks in jail on a criminal housing neglect charge.

Beat plans. Finally, the quality of the formal beat plan filed by each beat was rated on two criteria. The first was whether the plan was well thought out, whether it addressed what were considered to be the real and obvious problems in the area, and whether it showed evidence of thinking through the problems identified using the steps in which officers had received training. Some of the most highly rated beat plans specified a role for other city agencies, special units within the police department, and community organizations. Others were thrown together at the last minute to meet a deadline, without input from team officers and without attention to the issues raised by the public at beat community meetings. The completeness and logic of beat plans were assessed by reviewing the material stored in each beat's master file at the station house.

The second criterion of the beat plan rating was the extent to which the problems identified in the plan matched community assessments of what the beat's real problems were. In beats receiving a low measure on this rating scale, drastic discrepancies were observed between the public's view (as revealed by the survey and interviews with local activists) and police priorities. In some instances, the police knew this but disregarded public opinion, often because it did not prioritize "real crime." A harder call occurred when problems were left off the plan because officers feared that police headquarters would not think they were important enough. At least once, a district management team was chastised for listing what the top brass thought was a "nonproblem" just because it was a community priority. Near the top of the rating scale, the beats' priorities were very much in line with the concerns of residents voiced at beat community meetings.

Categorizing the Beats

The final categorization of the study beats as excellent, reasonable, struggling, or failing was based on a statistical clustering using the five evaluative scores. The beats cast together in each cluster resembled one another more closely on all five dimensions than they resembled beats in another cluster.

Excellent programs: Solid leadership

The best programs were mounted in Two-Turf, Bungalow Belt, Norte, and Inner City. These beats enjoyed solid leadership by beat team leaders, and their officers often were enthusiastic and innovative. For the most part, their beat plans and profiles were up to date, and quite frequently they were used by officers as well as team leaders. The priority problems identified in the beat plans were regularly addressed. Beat team meetings were well attended and officers spoke up. They also regularly engaged in community outreach efforts. While sophisticated joint problem solving was not necessarily in evidence (it was rare everywhere), information was consistently and effectively shared between police and residents at beat community meetings.

"Paperwork" did not seem to be a big problem here; in fact, police working in some of these beats developed their own, including special forms for addressing problems brought up at beat meetings but not yet prioritized, and they made frequent use of interdepartmental request forms so that other units and outside resources could be brought to bear on beat issues. City services forms were also frequently used by officers on beat teams receiving higher ratings, in contrast to officers on beat teams receiving lower ratings, who tended to see the city services forms as yet another imposition by the brass downtown.

Two-Turf was the most highly rated beat. Police there regularly worked on priority problems and reported on progress at beat team and community meetings. They were also quick to take on fresh problems raised at beat community meetings. Their team meetings were energetic, and the officers did not hesitate to debate ideas that were tossed around, even when their bosses were present. They developed nontraditional solutions to two issues identified by the community as important: public drinking and truck parking on residential streets. They also added street prostitution to the official list of priority problems at the insistence of the community, although they did not think it was a serious problem in the area. The day shift was aggressive in combating graffiti, a significant problem in this Latino area. The team sergeant developed well-conceived beat plans that identified clear and addressable problems at specific locations. He insisted that officers follow up on all issues raised at community meetings, and he kept a list to make sure that they did. The sergeant and his officers worked to build citizen involvement in community meetings and had good relations with neighborhood activists. Police in Two-Turf made aggressive use of city services, and representatives of city agencies were frequently invited to attend community meetings. The lieutenant in charge actively reviewed the work of his teams, attended community and beat team meetings, and on occasion identified problems that transcended a single beat and called for a coordinated response. The Neighborhood Relations unit created and distributed a newsletter for the district but (consistent with the department's plan) stood aside and let beat team officers conduct public meetings.

Reasonable programs: Underdeveloped aspects

In general, beats with reasonable programs had most elements of the city's program in place, but aspects of their work were underdeveloped. The five beats in this group included Solid Mix (which was quite diverse), Middle Classes (white and black homeowners), Rebuilding (blacks threatened with gentrification), Southtown (blacks and Latinos), and Property Values. While beat team members in these areas could be conscientious, well intentioned, and open to the program, some were not regularly working on priority problems or making efforts to involve the community. The beat team sergeants might have a good grasp of problem solving and stay up to date administratively, but some failed to give feedback or guidance to their officers. Although most officers seemed to be vested in the program, an entire watch group (usually midnight) sometimes evaded involvement. Younger officers often demonstrated a preference for aggressive and action-oriented tactics over community work, and in the beats ranking toward the bottom of this category the police were still largely incident driven.

Struggling programs: Little meaningful problem-solving activity

Beat teams in one of the two struggling areas—Blue Collars and Potpourri (extremely diverse)—gave lip service to the concept of problem solving but showed little evidence of understanding it in any meaningful way; in the other area they understood the intentions of the program but were uninterested in extending themselves to make it effective. In neither area was much of an effort made to explore the benefits of the new systems and resources available to them, and community involvement was seen by too many officers as a burden. In neither case did the beat sergeant provide much leadership. One simply showed lack of enthusiasm for the program, and the other was unsuccessful in rousing his group of rather unimaginative officers. Their beat plans were incomplete and virtually never were consulted. Officers frequently did not attend to issues raised at beat community meetings, and sometimes they failed to report on their efforts when they did.

Failing programs: Little implementation

In the failing areas, few elements of the program had been implemented or even attempted. These areas included Fiesta, Old Guard, Pride, and Stir Fry. Officers serving there often indicated they felt hopeless about their ability to make a dent in problems in their beats, and their sergeants felt that community policing would not change matters—except to burden their officers with more responsibilities and unnecessary paperwork. They relied almost solely on traditional policing tactics, and their beat plans were largely ignored by the beat team. Officers often demonstrated resentment toward community meetings, indicating they were perceived primarily as forums for residents to criticize the police or demand that they waste their time on noncrime problems.

Policing in Stir Fry fell at the bottom of the list. Officers who worked there assumed they could not resolve any of the beat's problems. They did not look beyond their traditional crime-fighting role but did not think that standard tactics were going to make a difference either. Beat team members indicated that they were not doing anything different than they had in the past, but still reported that "community policing isn't working." Their sergeant thought CAPS was a public relations program and resented the paperwork it imposed on him. He made up his beat plan to encompass a few efforts already undertaken by local activists and then declared that he would not use it. He did not want to press too hard on his officers, who already felt "put upon" by the demands of problem solving. His view of beat community meetings was that they were just a forum for voicing complaints about the police. Fiesta's officers just appeared to be frozen in time, doing what they always had done, seemingly untouched by the department's new directives. Their tactics were unmarked by the problem-solving training they had received. Their response to drunks and panhandlers on the area's bustling commercial strip was to chase them away. They held the community at arm's length and sat apart during community meetings. They did not utilize the city's new service request forms. As one officer put it, "Everybody complains to us. Why can't the community call their alderman to complain? What do potholes have to do with police work?" In this graffiti-plastered area, only three-tenths of one percent of the city's cleanup efforts were triggered by a police service request.

Leadership Is Key

The evaluation indicated that the most important factor determining the extent to which problem solving was implemented on the ground was leadership. Leadership accounted for a great deal of the variation among the beats, and the closer leaders were to officers in the field, the more their leadership counted. Although there was considerable variation among the district commanders included in this study, that did not account for as much of the variation among the beats as did the differences in efforts among beat team sergeants. The commanders' understanding of community policing and their expressed support of and commitment to the program were fairly visible to observers and other members of the district management team, but these factors were not closely mirrored by what beat sergeants or their officers did or their extent of community outreach.

Lieutenants who directly oversaw the beat team sergeants had greater impact on beat ratings than did district commanders. Across the beats, how actively lieutenants managed their sergeants and officers made a difference in what they did. There was a great deal of variation in how the lieutenants did their jobs. Some carefully reviewed beat plans and gave their sergeants feedback to improve them, and others simply signed them. A few (but not many) studied beat plans intently enough to identify generic problems that cut across beat boundaries. Some made a practice of occasionally attending beat team and community meetings, while others did not appear to know much about what went on there.

The beat team sergeants played *the* key role in the process. What they did accounted for a great deal of the variation in what their officers managed to accomplish. Assessment of beat officers' performance was based on whether they actually worked on the problems identified as priorities for the beat, employed the steps that constituted the problem-solving model, and developed nontraditional strategies in tackling problems on their beat. They performed these activities more frequently when their sergeants pushed them to focus on the key problems, stressed problem solving, clarified the importance of following department protocols, and held productive team meetings. For example, Bungalow Belt's sergeant strongly supported community policing. He directed extremely productive team meetings and contributed his own creative strategies to discussions about resolving problems. He kept officers focused on the beat's priority problems and reminded them to keep their paperwork up to date. On the other hand, Fiesta's sergeant just went through the motions. He composed a beat plan on his own that ignored many of the beat's visible problems, and his officers did not know what the area's prioritized problems were. Pride's sergeant thought community policing was a public relations trick; he dubbed it "public appeasement policing" and complained it was about missing garbage can lids.

The best sergeants also worked hard to involve the community and to respond to their concerns. Community meetings in Bungalow Belt featured printed agendas, crime maps, and flip charts for recording problems and solutions, and the sergeant there worked hard to convince residents to take an active role in problem solving. Police in Norte, a predominately Latino beat, had difficulty involving residents, so the team identified a problem that residents could help them tackle—illegal dumping—and encouraged them to take on the "eyes and ears" task of identifying offending trucks. In Old Guard—a homeowning, middle-class, "pro-police" black community with the third-highest beat meeting attendance rate of the group—the sergeant did not know the beat or the people who lived there, did not press his officers to work on prioritized problems, and thought that community meetings were being held too frequently because the same problems came up every time.

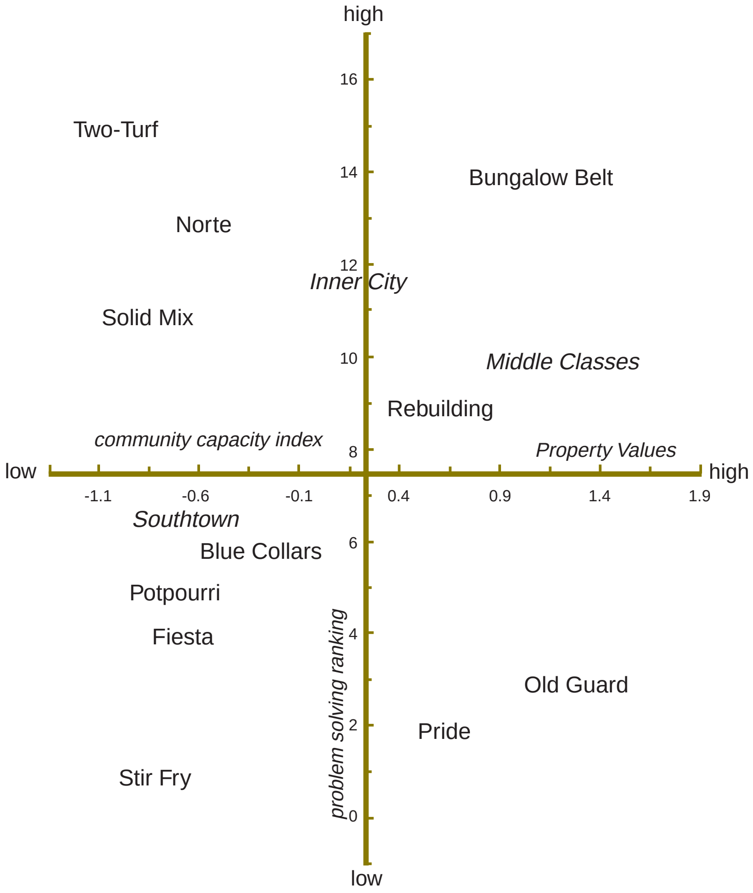
Community Capacity and Police Effectiveness

The ratings developed through the study showed how effectively problem-oriented policing was being delivered in different kinds of city neighborhoods. In particular, they could be compared to the indicators of community capacity previously described in this report to assess the extent to which police efforts reinforced existing capabilities or supplemented the efforts of communities struggling to cope with their problems. The first question is, Was problem solving in Chicago helping better-off areas become even better off, or was it helping worse-off places become better off? The high-capacity places were already well positioned to defend themselves through politics, downtown connections, their infrastructure of community organizations, and people's willingness to intervene to protect the community. They already admired the police, they turned out in larger numbers to attend their beat meetings, and those who came to meetings became involved in a wide range of problem-solving partnerships because of the breadth of their linkages with each other and the community. In the surveys conducted, they reported that they were not so overwhelmed with problems, which were fewer in high-capacity areas. It was not clear how much help they *really* needed as compared with Chicagoans living in areas rated farther down the community capacity scale.

Study findings: No direct association between community capacity and program implementation

The study findings are represented in figure 3. The horizontal axis situates each beat in terms of its capacity, ranging from low to high. The vertical axis arrays each beat on its police implementation ranking, placing those where problem solving was the most advanced near the top and those where it was not far advanced near the bottom. Figure 3 includes three beats that were not surveyed, although police operations were intensively studied there: Middle Classes, Inner City, and Southtown. These beats were included using statistical techniques

Figure 3: Community Capacity and Police Problem Solving



to estimate their capacity score based on variables such as voter turnout that were highly correlated with capacity. These areas are presented in italics in figure 3 to denote their more tentative position.

As figure 3 illustrates, no direct association was found between community capacity and program implementation. Rather, worse-off places were about as likely to enjoy well-implemented or poorly implemented programs as were their better-off neighbors. This is quite different from the results observed in the distribution of community capacity. In that case, measure after measure pointed to advantages shared by the same set of communities. The benefits of informal social control, organizational involvement, political mobilization, and downtown connections all seemed to accrue to the same fortunate areas. They were also the most racially homogeneous, stable, home-owning, and affluent beats. However, it was *not* the case that better-off places with a homegrown capability for handling problems were also the beats where police problem-solving efforts were most firmly in place. Only one beat (Bungalow Belt) scored near the top on both dimensions, and two other beats fell into the "reasonable programs" category and also ranked high on their capacity for self defense (Middle Classes and Property Values).

The distribution of successful and unsuccessful programs also did not closely mirror the heterogeneity or homogeneity of these areas. Those with the best programs were often quite diverse. Among them, only black Inner City had a high homogeneity index; Two-Turf and Norte housed significant numbers of blacks as well as both Puerto Ricans and Mexican-Americans, and Solid Mix was home to whites, Latinos, and small numbers of residents of other ethnicities. On the other hand, the two most diverse areas—Stir Fry and Potpourri—were not well served at all.

Ironically, even in the beat that showed the greatest congruence between a well-implemented problem-solving program and high levels of community capacity and racial homogeneity, these advantages did not automatically translate into wild success. Bungalow Belt was honeycombed with community organizations, and beat meetings there averaged more than 100 participants; however, residents were not particularly involved in joint projects with the police. They worked independently of police because their foremost concern was white flight from the neighborhood. Their efforts were directed mostly at protecting property values and stabilizing the local real estate market through home improvement campaigns, special mortgage loan programs, and aggressive marketing of the area among prospective home buyers. CAPS provided a valuable framework for encouraging police to do *their* work more effectively, but residents worked on their highest priority concerns outside the structure provided by the city's problem-solving framework.

On the other hand, three of the most highly rated beats had relatively little "homegrown" capacity for problem solving. In those areas (Two-Turf, Norte, and Inner City), police supplemented the efforts of communities with relatively limited capabilities for resolving their own problems. In terms of income, all three fell among the bottom quarter of all beats in the city. None was particularly stable—all were in the bottom half of the study beats in terms of age and length of residence—nor did any have strong enough connections downtown to demand better police service. All three scored low on political mobilization, and none had demonstrated much ability to extract resources from the wider community. They also were not places where police and the public just naturally got along. In the survey, all three of these highly rated beats were in the bottom half on a measure of the perceived quality of police service. One lesson of this study is that public perception of police service provides an uncertain guide to the actual quality of local policing, at least as was observed in action in these communities. Finally, these were not places with easy-to-handle problems, where successes were easy to achieve. All were plagued by drugs and gangs.

Although there was no clear association between the "haves and have-nots" and the quality of community policing in these areas, there certainly were left-out places. Near the bottom of the implementation index shown in figure 3 lay three communities that were in great need of help but were not receiving much: Stir Fry, Fiesta, and Potpourri. All were poor, disenfranchised, and among the five beats with the largest volume of problems, but they also had struggling or failing problem-solving programs. Finally, two middle-income black beats—Pride and Old Guard—lay in the quadrant where communities had a high self-help capacity but community policing was not very effectively implemented. The irony is that these beats were among the most supportive of the police, ranking third and fourth in the survey. They were homogeneous with respect to race, and they were served largely by black police officers. Both also had proven downtown connections and a high capacity to mobilize politically, but the police did not manage to implement the program there. These left-out beats were primarily the victims of organizational circumstance. Implementation of Chicago's problem-solving program was highly dependent on staffing, management, and leadership factors, all of which were internal to the department and not particularly reflective of the capacities of the community.

Enhancing Program Implementation: Recommendations for the Future

The findings described in this report reflect observations over a 1-year period, but the city's program is continually evolving. Some administrative moves were made to speed program implementation while the evaluation was under way but before the moves could have much effect. For example, extensive meetings were held between program managers and representatives of the districts' management teams to review the quality of their beat plans and the first of their new district-level plans. These daylong sessions were an occasion to review with everyone how the program was supposed to work. Leaders also needed the support of those below them to translate this vision into operational terms. In Chicago, the solution to this problem was more training for sergeants. Sergeants never practiced problem solving themselves, so they needed a thorough grounding in the basics. The new stance of the organization called for them to "coach" or "mentor" officers in their new roles, but the habits of the older, hierarchical management structure were hard to break.

What can be done to facilitate the implementation of problem solving? Recommendations for the future include efforts to develop training, knowledge bases, self-assessment, and leadership capabilities.

Training

More *training* is needed for beat officers. Problem solving calls for police to think creatively and to invent or adopt tactics that they were not taught as rookies (although they are now an integral part of Chicago's curriculum). Problem solving relies heavily on judgment and initiative in a department where officers have long been expected to do their job by following the rules in the book. In the absence of effective training (and supervision), it is easy for police to fall back on familiar ways of dealing with whatever problem is at hand. It is also easier not to make mistakes that way, which is important if there are few positive rewards for doing good community-oriented work (see below). However, training is expensive and time consuming and can easily be shortchanged. Without good training, police are likely to move directly from identifying problems to acting on them instinctively, shortcutting information gathering and analysis.

Knowledge bases

It is also time to think about enhancing the capacity of police departments *to learn from themselves*, to support more creative problem solving. Relatively little planned nontraditional problem solving was observed, while ad hoc efforts of individual officers largely went undocumented. Officers had no systematic way to share their expertise or even just their problem-solving experiences. Departments need to build “knowledge bases” of successful practice that can inform future problem-solving efforts, perhaps by creating online systems that will match simple descriptions of current problems with an inventory of past successes in tackling similar problems. They also need to provide references that will enable departments to find the required resources and expertise.

Self-assessment

The most important recommendation is the most difficult one. Like other cities, Chicago needs to develop practical ways to measure and monitor the problem-solving efforts of units, teams, and individual officers, and to assess their effectiveness. Large police departments have a great deal of difficulty in determining whether any problem solving is taking place and, if so, whether it is any good. Police officers go out into the night alone or in pairs, and they work largely without direct supervision. Usually departments can keep track of only their most overt activities—how many calls they respond to, how fast they drive, whether they arrest anyone or hand out enough tickets, how often they show up late for work, and whether they attract any formal complaints from civilians. Departments obviously track the crime reports made by victims, because the resulting dispatches that have to be dealt with represent the largest demand on the labor pool. As Herman Goldstein points out, many of the indicators that drive operational policing decisions and are used to assess officer and unit effectiveness have little to do with the *substance* of policing.[2] They have to do with keeping everyone busy and out of trouble. Those in the policing field know this, and it is a great source of frustration that there are few cheap and easy-to-interpret measures of the substance of policing to use in their stead. At the time this study was conducted, there were none for measuring the extent of problems, except in the garden-variety crime category. Also, there were no reliable and practical ways of assessing whether officers were working on any of the problems; no measures of the quality of their work; and no indicators of their effectiveness at solving the problems identified.

Leadership capabilities

As previously noted, there were district commanders who were committed to problem solving but unable to get things going on the street. The sergeants directly in charge had a clearer idea about what beat officers were doing, but at that level commitment to the program was spotty. The efforts of beat team officers and even their sergeants were relatively disconnected from the orientation of district managers. How well the commanders understood community policing and how vocal they were in support of the program were fairly visible to observers and to some members of the district management team, but these factors were not closely mirrored by what beat sergeants or their officers did or their extent of community outreach.

Change can occur only if a department's top managers, as well as senior community leaders, supply leadership and a vision of where the organization is headed. Knowing what they are doing now has to be matched with a clear statement of what they want to be doing in the future. They have to clarify the extent to which community-oriented work is a central mission of the department and how all parts of the organization can contribute to the mission. It is important that senior managers try, every day, to do something to push the organization down its new path. They must extend their message downward, through the communication, accountability, and reward structures that provide the levers by which they steer the organization.

Suggested Reading

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Notes

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