



# Public Involvement:

## Community Policing in Chicago



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# Summary

An important feature of many community policing initiatives is that they provide new avenues for citizen involvement in partnerships with police. Residents may be called upon to help identify and prioritize neighborhood problems for action, to become involved in problem-solving efforts, and to help shape police policies and operations. The commitment to responsiveness and information sharing that many police agencies make as they adopt community policing ideally must be matched on the civilian side with an enthusiastically involved representative segment of a concerned public. However, as with police officers, the extent to which neighborhood residents actively embrace community policing is highly variable. Assumptions about their initial enthusiasm for community policing can be made too casually. Police and residents may have a history of not cooperating, and in many poor neighborhoods the past is strewn with broken promises and programs that eventually evaporated.

Residents may also have difficulty sustaining participation. Community-based organizations are required to encourage involvement over the long term, and police may have to involve themselves in helping to build this supportive infrastructure. The public, like the police, also may need to be educated. Community policing involves new jargon as well as assumptions about the new responsibilities that both police and citizens are expected to adopt. Therefore, training will be required before any of the participants can fully appreciate their new roles. Moreover, all of these activities will have to involve a significant amount of face-to-face time between police and residents to develop trust and cooperation between the prospective partners. This report summarizes recent research on citizen involvement in Chicago's community policing initiative, known as the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS).

## Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy

One of the most significant CAPS features is the extensive new role played by the public. The city's model calls for neighborhood residents to help identify problems, formulate solutions to them, and play an

active part in solving them. Several venues have been created to support this involvement. On the police side, officers are committed to working with residents and to taking their concerns seriously when setting policing priorities.

While trying to make this work, CAPS has encountered all of the obstacles outlined above and more, so the city's successes and shortcomings may illuminate some of the difficulties other departments will likely face as they adopt a community policing model. This report examines key features of citizen involvement in the Chicago initiative, including citizen awareness and participation, and the extent to which CAPS is meeting police department goals for forming partnerships with the public.

CAPS was launched in late 1994 after an experimental period, and most aspects were operational in all of the city's police districts by May 1995. A problem-solving orientation anchors the model's core. Officers and their sergeants have received training in how to identify the victim, offender, and locational features of problems. Administrative systems have been developed to speed the delivery of city services to support problem-solving projects, and a number of city agencies have recently begun their own projects to support the initiative. Both city and county attorneys have opened decentralized offices to assist police in developing cases. A new departmental planning process will formally identify beat problems and culminate in the formulation of districtwide and citywide plans to combat them. In addition, an advanced analysis and mapping system has been developed to help identify crime patterns and hot spots, and a new computerized dispatching system has been inaugurated to manage police and fire calls.

Some of the most important CAPS features have been designed to help develop closer working relationships between police and the residents in each beat. A large segment of the patrol division has been reorganized into special teams and assigned to specific beats throughout the city, and a dispatching policy has been developed to ensure that teams have enough free time to work with the community and engage in proactive problem solving. Ideally, this configuration will result in officers becoming more familiar with their beats and residents growing more familiar with the police who serve there.



Citizen involvement in planning and strategizing has been vested in district advisory committees that regularly meet with commanders and their management teams to discuss local problems and priorities. The advisory committees sponsor subcommittees that focus on specific issues ranging from economic development to social events, and the subcommittees do most of the work. Each advisory committee determines the number and foci of their subcommittees based on local needs, although there are two mandated subcommittees: senior citizens and court advocacy.

### Community meetings

Community meetings held regularly in every beat enable many more residents to become involved in CAPS and are the principal focus of this report. These gatherings have been held in Chicago's 279 police beats nearly every month since 1995. Beat meetings are held in locations of all descriptions, including church basements, libraries, hospital cafeterias, and park district field houses. Attendees include police officers who work in the area and neighborhood residents. Beat meetings are designed to be the locus for identifying local problems and local resources for dealing with them, setting priorities, and deciding what to do about the most important issues. They are also important venues for the formation of partnerships between police and residents around problem-solving projects. Along with the district advisory committee, beat meetings are Chicago's principal forum for the development of joint police-citizen action plans for tackling neighborhood issues.

Beat community meetings are public sessions open to everyone. On average, 7 police officers and 26 residents attend. Police who regularly attend include beat team officers on duty at the time, a few team members from other shifts, and the sergeant who supervises them. Others who are often present include officers serving in special units, a representative of the district's neighborhood relations unit, and, sometimes, higher ranking members of the district's management team. Those who attend during their off-hours are paid overtime. Occasionally, representatives of the city's service departments, staff

for local aldermen, and organizers from area community groups also attend, and school principals and local business operators also may participate. To promote shared responsibility for the meetings, the department tries to involve a civilian “beat facilitator” in planning and conducting them.

Over time, the variety of meetings involving police and the public has grown as the districts have found new purposes for public gatherings. In some districts, special meetings for business owners who live out of the area focus on their unique problems; in others, separate sessions are held with neighborhood activists to craft action plans and prepare for beat meetings. A few large and diverse beats have chosen to break into sub-beats that meet separately each month. In a few areas plagued by low turnout, adjacent beats hold combined sessions to boost the number attending.

Police districts and individual beats sponsor other kinds of assemblies as well, including marches, rallies and block parties involving a large number of residents, and smaller meetings between police and neighborhood activists. Recently, the department has encouraged the districts to send officers to block club and community organization meetings, intending that the familiarity developed through such interactions will encourage more residents to attend official beat meetings. However, the data presented in this report apply only to regularly scheduled, official beat meetings.

### Study components

This report examines several aspects of citizen involvement in Chicago’s community policing effort. First, it describes *public awareness*. The findings highlight the impact of an aggressive marketing campaign that has significantly raised public awareness of community policing. Knowledge of the CAPS initiative has grown among all major groups and is highest among the city’s black residents.

Second, this report details *trends in beat meeting participation* over time and *where participation is high or low*. There is no evidence that the novelty of the effort has worn off; in fact, involvement has grown

each year since 1995. More significantly, attendance rates are highest in poor, high-crime communities, where public safety is most at risk and the perceived quality of police service is in question.

Third, the study examines *what happens at beat meetings*—the principal point at which partnerships are to be formed between police and neighborhood residents. However, getting beat meetings to function properly is a difficult implementation issue because they occur at hundreds of dispersed locations every month, out of sight of police headquarters and even midlevel managers. Although investigators found that the skeletal framework for beat meetings is solidly in place (they have agendas, materials are prepared in advance, and so forth), there is little evidence that beat meetings have become a general vehicle for the kind of systematic problem solving that the department envisions. Rather, many continue to function as “911” sessions where individuals express their complaints, or as “show and tell” meetings where police lecture and display crime maps or statistics while residents sit mute.

These findings are drawn from a continuing evaluation of Chicago’s community policing initiative conducted by the Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. The evaluation is supported by the National Institute of Justice, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. More details about CAPS and the evaluation findings can be found in the citations and suggested readings listed at the end of this report. Additional reports and methodological materials can be found at the evaluation’s Web site: [www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications/policing.html](http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications/policing.html).

## Public Awareness of Community Policing

The first question is, How broad is public awareness of community policing and how deep is the public’s understanding of its participatory nature? The CAPS evaluation conducts an annual survey of Chicago residents to assess the visibility of the city’s program. The most recent 4 years of data are considered in this report. In 1996, nearly 1,900 residents were interviewed; in 1997 and 1998,

nearly 3,000 were interviewed; and in 1999, more than 2,800 were interviewed. Interviews were conducted by telephone, in either English or Spanish, using random-digit dialing that reached households with both listed and unlisted telephone numbers. In addition to assessing levels of awareness, which have grown as a direct result of aggressive program marketing efforts, the yearly surveys track sources of awareness.

### Assessing awareness

Two survey questions revealed that public awareness of community policing has grown considerably. The first question asked whether respondents had heard about “a new program announced by the Chicago Police Department, a community policing program that calls for more cooperation between police and residents of Chicago”; the second question informed those who did not recognize the community policing program description that it was often referred to as “CAPS” and asked whether they had heard of CAPS. As table 1 indicates,

Table 1: Personal Background and Awareness of CAPS, 1996–99

	1996	1997	1998	1999		1996	1997	1998	1999
<i>Total %</i>	53	68	79	80	<i>No. of Cases</i>	1,868	3,066	2,937	2,871
<i>Whites</i>	52	73	78	80	<i>Renters</i>	50	67	75	76
<i>Blacks</i>	58	74	84	84	<i>Homeowners</i>	58	74	83	84
<i>Latinos</i>	51	62	73	73	<i>Low income</i>	48	59	69	73
<i>Spanish</i>	47	51	65	68	<i>Moderate income</i>	59	76	84	84
<i>English</i>	54	71	80	81	<i>Nongraduates</i>	41	54	62	69
<i>Age 18–29</i>	46	66	76	76	<i>High school graduates</i>	56	73	82	82
<i>Age 30–49</i>	61	74	83	84	<i>Females</i>	50	66	76	76
<i>Age 50–64</i>	53	74	80	82	<i>Males</i>	59	75	87	84
<i>Age 65+</i>	46	53	65	73					

Note: All subgroup percentages are based on data weighted to standardize the racial composition of the samples across years.

53 percent of Chicago residents knew about the program in 1996, 79 percent knew by 1998, and 80 percent knew by 1999. The small changes recorded between 1998 and 1999 may indicate that CAPS awareness has peaked.

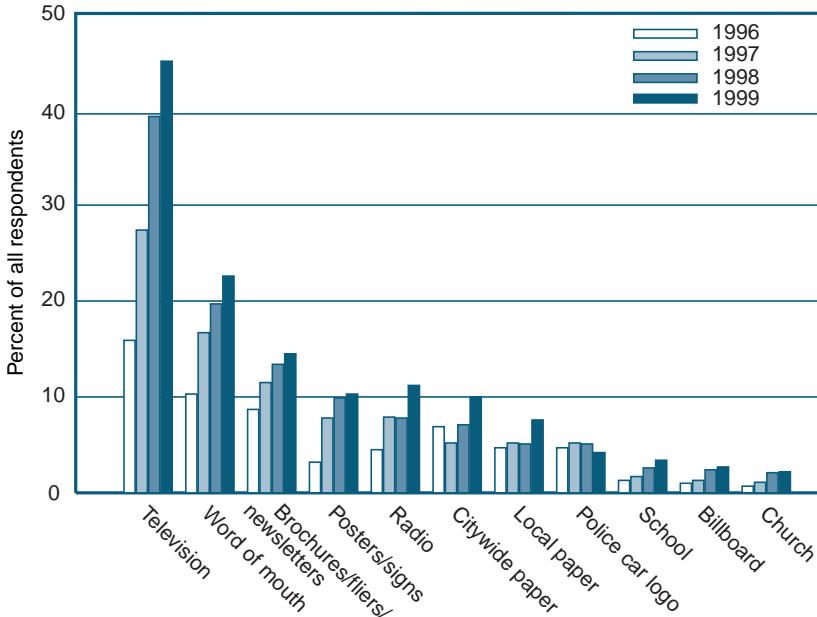
Table 1 also presents the percentage of respondents who knew about the program among major population subgroups. Between 1996 and 1998, recognition of CAPS increased substantially within every group over time. It increased most among those younger than age 30. CAPS awareness rose by 25 percentage points or more among many other groups, including both males and females, blacks and whites, and renters and homeowners. Substantial gains were registered by almost all categories of respondents, including those from both low-income and moderate-income households (a division made at an annual income of \$20,000). Significant gains in CAPS awareness were reported by respondents who preferred to be interviewed in Spanish (from 47 to 68 percent, a gain of 21 percentage points) and by those older than age 65 (from 46 to 73 percent, a gain of 27 percentage points).

While program recognition generally increased over this time period, existing gaps between groups were not erased. In 1999, large cleavages were apparent between high school graduates and those with less education, and between language groups; the subgroups in these categories were separated by 13 percentage points. There were gaps between low- and moderate-income people, and between senior citizens and those age 30 to 64. Differences in CAPS awareness among racial groups were relatively small. Blacks were somewhat more aware than whites, and Latinos were least likely to be aware of the program. Program awareness increased the least among Latinos (but went up by 22 percentage points) between 1996 and 1998.

### Tracking sources of awareness

To track sources of CAPS awareness, the yearly surveys also ask how people hear about community policing. Figure 1 presents the percentage of Chicagoans who recalled learning about CAPS in various ways and compares results from 1996 through 1999. Respondents were

Figure 1: Sources of CAPS Awareness



Note: Less frequent sources of awareness not depicted.

allowed to name up to five ways they recalled learning about CAPS or community policing; thus, the percentages presented in figure 1 add up to more than 100 percent. The surveys indicate that many information channels have become more effective in reaching people over time. The most dramatic increase, from 16 to almost 45 percent, was in the proportion of Chicagoans who learned about CAPS from television, which is the most common source of CAPS awareness. Word of mouth, including conversations with neighbors or friends, was the second most frequently recalled way people heard about CAPS. Between 1996 and 1999, talk about the program more than doubled in frequency, from 10 to 22 percent. There were also noticeable increases in the extent to which people reported hearing about CAPS from posters or signs and brochures, fliers, or newsletters. Radio became a more common source of awareness between 1996 and 1997, and again in 1999.

## Program marketing

This growth in awareness is the result of an aggressive, city-coordinated marketing effort featuring paid promotional spots on radio and television, ads in local newspapers, posters at rapid transit stops and high-traffic areas, and brightly colored CAPS advertisements displayed on buses and billboards. A city-sponsored half-hour “Crime Watch” series appears on two cable channels and one broadcast channel. The city also posts schedules for beat community meetings on the Internet and its cable channel. Information materials are distributed to community organizations, libraries, businesses, churches, and schools. In selected areas, targeted mailings have been conducted with local sponsors ranging from a bank to a residential property management company. City workers receive information describing CAPS and how to participate, and they are reminded of area schedules for beat community meetings. Finally, the city has sponsored a number of very large citywide rallies and workshops promoting the program and holds appreciation events for CAPS volunteers.

Civilian CAPS organizers annually attend more than 100 of the festivals that flourish during the summer months in Chicago and set up displays that explain CAPS and encourage participation in CAPS activities. Staff members are also involved in local marches, rallies, prayer vigils, and smoke outs (group barbecues held at gang or drug-infested sites), and a National Night Out every August features events in all 25 police districts. A catalog of free promotional materials, including pens, pencils, rulers, sticky notes, T-shirts, and refrigerator magnets, is also available.

Why such a large investment in program marketing? All levels of government recognize the importance of educating the public in tandem with legislating or acting on their behalf. For example, in the health and safety arenas, the messages “smoking stinks” and “buckle up for safety” have played a key role in increasing the effectiveness of taxation and regulation as public policy tools. Chicago’s community policing initiative depends to a great extent on active citizen involvement in beat meetings, district advisory committees, court advocacy groups, and other action projects. Therefore, it has been important to broaden

public awareness of the new opportunities for participation that CAPS has created and to encourage citizens to become involved.

Because CAPS represents a departure from past practice, program marketing also plays a vital educational function. Rather than simply asking the public to be the “eyes and ears” of the police, CAPS calls for residents’ active involvement in problem solving and in helping to set police priorities. Beat meetings are supposed to serve as a locus for finding solutions to problems and for involving participants in problem-solving projects—not just as a place to register complaints. Thus, residents need not only to attend meetings but also to understand their role in problem-solving policing.

Finally, the public needs to understand how CAPS changes “business as usual” in this important and very expensive public agency because the public pays the bill. In fiscal year 2000, the Chicago Police Department’s budget exceeded \$1 billion. Police depend on the communities they serve for both financial and moral support, and, as taxpayers, the public needs to understand the new department strategy they are being asked to pay for.

## Beat Meeting Participation

The surveys quizzed respondents about their involvement in beat meetings, which were launched citywide in 1995 after an experimental period in several test districts. The beat meeting is one of Chicago’s most important mechanisms for building and sustaining close relationships between police and the public. These meetings provide a forum for exchanging information and a venue for identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing problems at the neighborhood level. They also offer opportunities for police and residents to meet face to face and to become acquainted, a feature supported by forming teams of officers with relatively long-term commitments to working in the beat. These meetings are the most important vehicle through which police-community partnerships can develop.



### Meeting publicity

In recent years, about 60 percent of Chicagoans have been aware that community anticrime meetings are held in their area. Among those who know, about 28 percent (or 14 percent of all Chicago adults) reported attending at least one CAPS beat meeting. Each beat usually holds its monthly meetings at a fixed location on a scheduled night (for example, the third Thursday). The meetings are held in public and easily accessible park buildings, church basements, apartment building recreation rooms, and schools, and almost all start at 6:30 or 7 p.m. In surveys distributed at beat meetings during 1998, participants were asked how they had heard about meeting times and locations. Of those responding, 37 percent had learned about the meeting through brochures and fliers announcing the meeting, 22 percent through personal conversations, and 13 percent through a local newspaper. Only a few mentioned finding the information on the World Wide Web, where meeting schedules are also posted. Many meeting participants (46 percent) heard about the meeting or had received a flier from a neighbor; another 20 percent had received information from the police.

### Role of attendance frequency

The frequency with which residents attended beat meetings played an important role in driving overall attendance. In 1998, the average Chicagoan who went to any meetings reported attending an average of 3.3, but this figure conceals large differences between occasional attenders and committed activists. More than half of all participants (54 percent) attended just once or twice. Only a few went often, but their appearances bolstered yearly attendance totals. For example, only 11 percent attended more than half the year—seven or more beat meetings—but they contributed 30 percent of all appearances at the meetings. The commitment of “regulars” to meetings plays an important role in the overall success of this aspect of CAPS.

## Activist characteristics

The activists were not just a cross-section of their communities. Instead, they were more inclined than occasional participants or nonattenders to be upbeat about their communities and the police and to be involved in local affairs. Frequent attenders more often reported that conditions in their neighborhoods were improving and that they had worked together with their neighbors to watch each other's homes. They belonged to more local associations, and they learned about CAPS at community rallies, at booths at neighborhood festivals, and from their neighbors. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between involvement and assessments of the quality of neighborhood police service. The respondents are divided by their activism (those who did or did not know about CAPS), and by their attendance (those who attended just a few beat meetings or more frequently). The questions about police are represented by the percentage of each group reporting they were doing a "very good job," the highest possible rating in the survey.

Figure 2: Involvement and Positive Assessments of Police

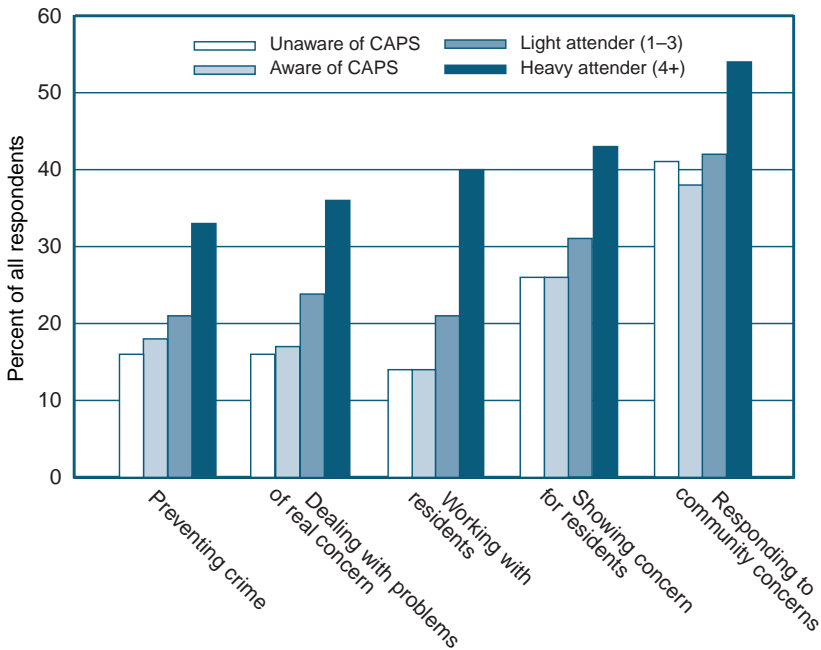


Figure 2 reveals that simple awareness of the city's community policing program was not related to what people thought about police. In figure 2, the higher the bar, the more positive respondents were on each dimension. Those who attended a few meetings were somewhat more positive, and committed participants were much more so. What is the linkage between the two? Participation may lead to more positive assessments of police; as indicated in this report, those who attend think very highly of what goes on at the meetings. Alternatively, those with a more positive outlook may be more likely to turn out, while already alienated residents stay away. A fraction of those who attend may not have a particularly positive experience and subsequently drop out. All of these possibilities are consistent with the data, and probably all are at work at the same time.

## Key attendance factors

What led Chicagoans to attend beat meetings? The surveys revealed two factors that seem to sustain involvement in the meetings and are also relevant to the efforts of community activists and city agencies. First, *how* people learned about CAPS counted because this was linked to whether they turned out. The second factor affecting attendance was civic engagement. The more involved Chicagoans were in community affairs, the more likely they were to know about CAPS, to be aware of beat meetings, and to actually attend the meetings.

**Source of awareness.** Although television was central to expanding awareness of CAPS, it appears to play a limited role in encouraging Chicagoans to attend beat meetings. The 1998 survey revealed that 29 percent of respondents who knew about CAPS and recalled learning about it from television actually attended a meeting. The comparable figure for those who did not mention television at all was 36 percent. Talking about CAPS with someone else had just the opposite relationship to attendance; 41 percent of respondents in this category attended a meeting versus 28 percent of those who did not hear about CAPS by word of mouth.

Obviously, not all of these differences can be attributed to exposure to the program. Different kinds of people learned about CAPS in

different ways, and these differences almost certainly affected their involvement as well. For example, respondents who recalled learning about CAPS via newspapers also were significantly less fearful of crime and more positive in their views of police than everyone else who knew about CAPS, and both of these factors were also related to actually getting involved. However, in a statistical analysis of meeting attendance, the positive effects of personal conversation and the negative effects of television exposure persisted even after controlling for 12 individual factors (ranging from age and race to language and home ownership) and 2 measures of residents' personal experiences with the police during the previous year. Although stronger evidence of an experimental nature would be required to confirm this finding, the survey suggests that television marketing promotes program awareness but not participation, while personal contact and locally initiated fliers and newsletters promote both.

The limited impact of television, the largest and most rapidly growing source of CAPS awareness, may help explain why beat meeting attendance has not grown dramatically over the 1996–99 period. Based on yearly surveys, the percentage of Chicagoans attending beat meetings has remained at about 12 to 14 percent of the adult population. During this period, awareness has grown a great deal, but involvement has not grown as much.

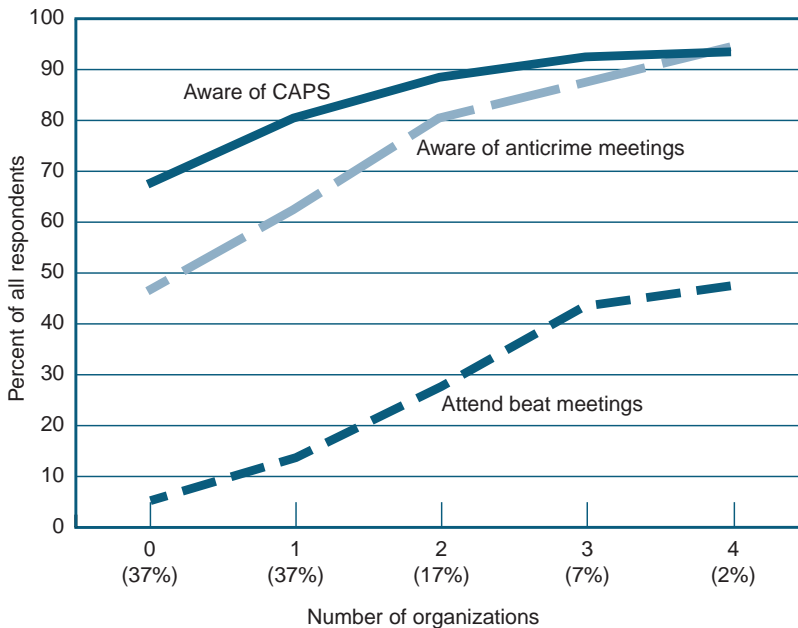
**Civic engagement.** Another factor affecting involvement is the linkages that individuals have to their community. Figure 3 illustrates the strong relationship between civic engagement and CAPS involvement. Based on 1998 data, the measure of civic engagement is based on responses to four survey questions about whether respondents or any other individuals in their households were involved in a neighborhood watch group or citizen patrol, the local PTA or local school council, a church or synagogue, or a block club or community organization. As the percentages arrayed across the bottom axis of figure 3 indicate, 37 percent of respondents indicated that their household was not involved in any of those activities, and another 37 percent were involved in just one. At the upper end, 2 percent of those who were interviewed were involved in all four of these kinds of organizations. The average household was involved in one type of group.

One of the strongest social correlates of civic engagement was race. Blacks were much more likely to be involved in local groups, both when church membership was included (as it is in figure 3) and when only secular organizations were counted. Latinos were dramatically less likely than others to report being involved, and whites lay between the two.

The positive link between home ownership/length of residence and civic engagement was about as strong as race, while Spanish-speakers were less likely than others to report being connected to their community through local organizations.

These differences have consequences. Figure 3 documents the linkage between civic engagement and levels of CAPS awareness, meeting awareness, and actual beat meeting attendance. The differences are striking. Awareness of CAPS stood above 90 percent for those involved in three or four kinds of organizations, and awareness of neighborhood anticrime meetings was almost as high. Beat meeting

Figure 3: Organizational Involvement and CAPS Awareness



Note: The percentage in parentheses under “number of organizations” indicates respondent involvement in zero to four organizations.

attendance rose steadily with levels of civic engagement, rising to more than 40 percent among those involved in at least three kinds of local organizations. Each kind of organization was important and contributed to the rising levels of CAPS involvement shown in figure 3. Although church involvement may seem relatively unrelated to community policing, during 1998 about one-third of all beat meetings were *held* in Chicago's churches, especially in predominately black communities where both CAPS and church involvement are particularly strong.

Only families with children living at home reported being involved in school affairs, but some of these families heard about CAPS from materials their children brought home from the city's public and parochial schools. Among those belonging to a block club, 92 percent had heard of CAPS, and 86 percent had heard about anticrime meetings in their neighborhoods.

Not surprisingly, people who were involved in a wide range of community activities were also more likely to report that they had learned about CAPS via word of mouth, a factor described above as related to actual involvement. Other indicators of civic engagement point to similar conclusions. For example, among respondents who recently had asked a neighbor to watch their home while they were gone, 72 percent knew about neighborhood meetings and 23 percent had attended a meeting. Both figures are well above the average. Finally, although not shown in figure 3, those who were heavily involved in local organizations were likely to attend *more* meetings in a year than those who were not. Respondents who were involved in just one group attended an average of three beat meetings, and those involved in all four kinds of groups reported attending an average of almost five meetings.

Civic engagement was linked to CAPS involvement in part through its role in spreading awareness of the effort. For example, among those who were not involved in any of the organizations examined in figure 3, only 19 percent had heard about CAPS via personal conversations. Among those with three or four affiliations, that figure rose to 35 percent. Civic engagement was also linked to CAPS awareness through fliers and newsletters as well as marches and rallies. On the other

hand, the more involved people were with civic organizations, the less likely they were to have heard about CAPS on television.

The important role civic engagement plays in supporting CAPS involvement has been observed at other points as well. During 1995 and 1996, the city and a local community organization conducted problem-solving training for thousands of residents. A followup study conducted 4 months later to examine which participants actually used their new skills revealed that the most important factor distinguishing those who became involved in problem solving was their prior level of involvement in community-based organizations like those examined here. The more involved participants were, the more they did. Among those who were affiliated with four or more organizations, more than 80 percent had participated actively in identifying and solving a local problem. Like respondents in the current study, trainees who were more involved in the organizational life of their community were also more likely to attend beat meetings and to have become involved in other CAPS-related activities.<sup>1</sup>

### Beat meeting effectiveness

Residents who attended beat meetings were encouraged by what they saw. There was a strong consensus that the meetings were useful and productive. In 1998, 87 percent of those who attended at least one beat community meeting reported they had learned something there, and 92 percent reported that the meetings were “very” or “somewhat” useful for finding solutions to neighborhood problems. A majority of attendees (72 percent) reported that actions were taken as a result of the meetings or that they noticed a change in their neighborhood resulting from decisions made at the meetings.

People with more education were more likely to think that beat meetings were having an effect; the percentages who agreed with this proposition ranged from 56 percent among those without a high school diploma to 78 percent among college graduates. Higher income respondents were more optimistic, but there were no differences between renters and homeowners in this regard, and few differences among whites, Latinos, and blacks. In addition to serving as a useful

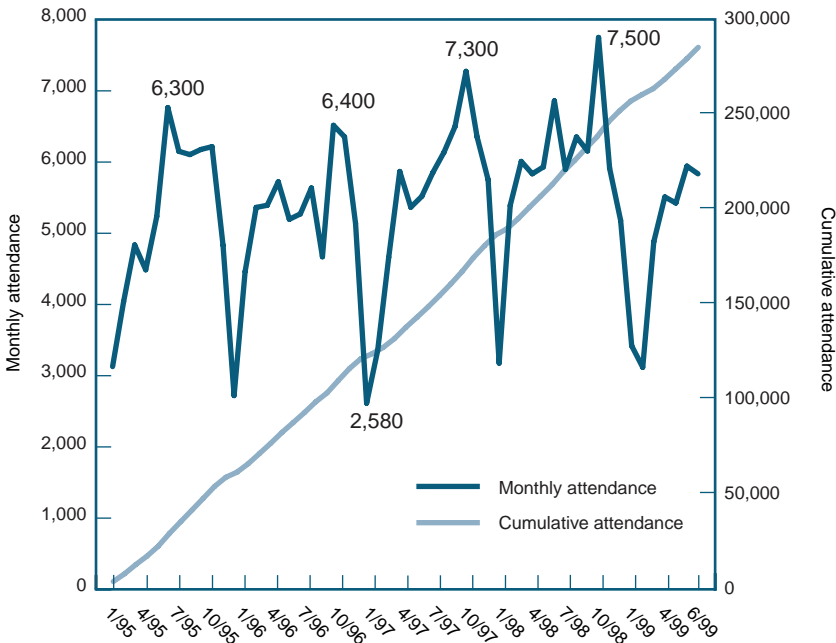
vehicle for problem solving, 91 percent credited the meetings as being “very” or “somewhat” useful in improving police-community relations.

## Attendance Trends

Trends in citizen beat meeting attendance were monitored using data drawn from brief forms completed by the officers who attended. These forms detailed where and when meetings were held and who was there. The reliability of police records regarding these basic meeting features was cross-checked by comparing them with reports compiled by observers for the sample of beat meetings they attended each year; agreement between the two was found to be high.

Figure 4 charts trends in beat meeting participation between January 1995 and June 1999. The left axis reports monthly attendance figures, and the right axis presents the cumulative total of attendees since the

Figure 4: Trends in Beat Meeting Attendance, 1995–99





starting date. It is apparent that attendance is seasonal, reflecting Chicago's weather. Based on these data, Chicagoans attended beat meetings about 59,200 times during 1995 and nearly 62,120 times during 1996. The total for 1997 was 65,300, and it was 69,700 for 1998. As the right axis on figure 4 indicates, during this 54-month period Chicagoans attended beat meetings on nearly 300,000 occasions. These totals are silent on issues such as how many new participants attended each month and how many participants were regular attenders. However, as reported above, the counts are importantly affected by the frequency with which residents attended and the percentage of residents who turned out. (The growth in attendance between 1996 and 1999 is within the bounds of sampling error and year-to-year fluctuations in the survey findings presented in this report.)

## Patterns of Participation

Investigators combined meeting reports for each of the city's beats during 1998 to calculate the average monthly attendance rate for each area. Data from other sources (including census, crime, and school and health indicators) were combined to compare to these rates and to describe the social and economic correlates of attendance. To compare attendance across beats, it was necessary to take into account the varying size of the beats. The boundaries of the city's police beats were drawn to equalize workloads (measured by calls for service) among them, rather than population.

In general, only adults come to beat meetings, so the denominator for each beat's attendance rate was the number of residents aged 18 and older. These population figures were based on projections for 1998, calculated from post-1990 updates to the census assembled by Claritas Corporation. The estimated 1998 population of beats ranged from 2,130 to almost 25,000, and the number of adults ranged from 1,200 to 21,000. A few other beats were excluded entirely because their residential populations were even smaller (they were located in either industrial areas or the downtown business district). All of the

measures examined here except beat racial composition were logged to correct skewed distributions.

### Attendance

Where was beat meeting attendance high, and where was it low? Attendance rates were highest in predominately black areas of the city, and they were lowest in largely white beats. Rates were low among beats where the Latino population averaged 20 to 60 percent but were somewhat higher in beats with larger concentrations of Latino residents. This parallels the finding presented in other reports on this evaluation, that beat meeting participation among Latinos is highest where “critical masses” of Latinos reside. This does not represent a large number of beats, however. Based on 1998 population estimates, just 34 of the city’s 279 beats were more than 60 percent Latino. More Latinos lived in areas where participation rates were somewhat lower.

Figure 5 shows the relationship between beat meeting attendance and measures of crime and affluence. One panel at the bottom of figure 5 documents that attendance was highest in low-income areas—rates tended to be higher in areas where more people reported making less than \$15,000 per year. Attendance rates were lowest in beats that are home to a large proportion of college graduates, as illustrated by the other panel at the bottom of figure 5. The link (not shown) between home ownership and area rates of participation—which is often quite high for volunteer-based neighborhood programs—was very weak. All of these relationships persisted when other factors were controlled for statistically. In multivariate analyses, violent crime was the strongest factor explaining participation rates. As the two panels at the top of figure 5 indicate, high attendance rates were associated with a high personal crime rate and also with vandalism. The link between high-volume property crimes and participation was weaker and stood at about zero for burglary and auto theft, which are highest in better-off areas of the city.

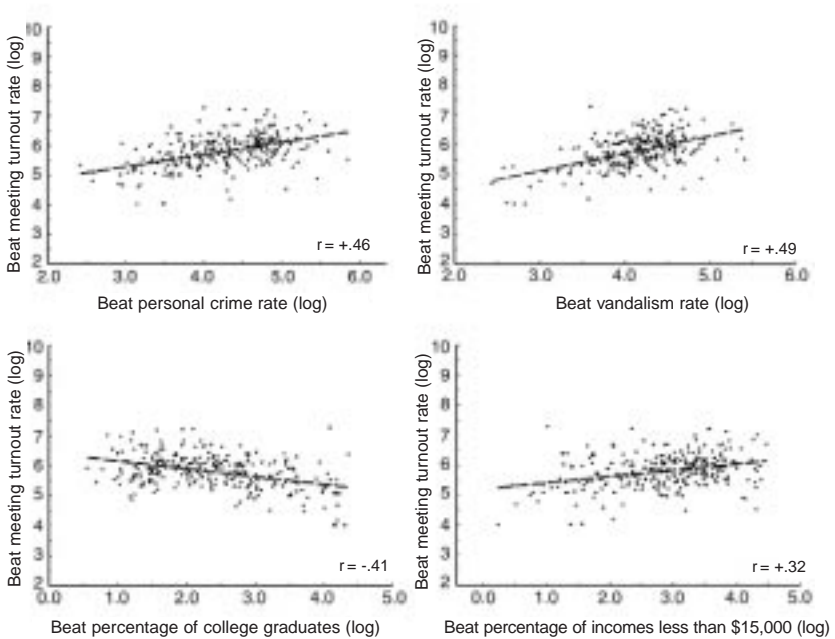
Other factors were linked to levels of attendance as well. Rates were higher in communities where other societal institutions have failed.

For example, attendance was relatively high in areas where test scores for the city’s public school students are low, truancy rates are high, and graduation rates are poor. Attendance was also higher in areas where residents have significant health problems, including high rates of gonorrhea and tuberculosis, and high infant mortality.

### Significance of findings

These patterns are significant for at least two reasons. First, they run counter to many of the pressures that historically have shaped police-community relations in poor and disenfranchised communities, where residents too often have had troubled relationships with the police who serve them. These residents are more likely to think they do not receive good service and that police are abusive toward their neighbors. Organizations that represent them also may not have a track

Figure 5: Patterns of Beat Meeting Attendance, 1998



r = correlation between the two variables; each dot represents a police beat.

record of cooperating with police, since their constituents too often fear them.

Second, these findings run counter to the usual pattern of participation in voluntary community-based programs, which typically overrepresent the interests of better-off, home-owning, and well-established areas. This pattern is so common that it is the norm to expect a “middle-class bias” in volunteer-based social programs. Around the country, it has proven to be difficult to sustain the involvement of the residents of communities that need community policing the most. In Chicago, however, turnout rates for the city’s community policing program are positively related to many measures of need. They are especially high in predominately black beats, in high-crime areas, and in areas where other agencies are not effectively meeting residents’ needs.

## Beat Meetings in Practice

What goes on when people do attend beat meetings? To examine the dynamics of beat meetings more closely, observers attended 459 meetings during 1998. They completed forms recording specific details about each session, including where the meeting was located, who attended, and the basics of what went on. They were also trained to make judgments about matters such as how effectively police and civilian leaders conducted the meetings. This analysis uses the data captured through these forms to characterize the 256 beats for which observations were completed.

From the outset, CAPS planners had a clear vision of how beat community meetings were to be conducted and what was supposed to happen there. The beat meeting was to provide a place to share information, identify problems, and develop action plans. Both police and citizens were expected to take responsibility for problem-solving projects, and the beat meeting was to offer a venue for everyone to review their progress and assess how well they were doing. Early evaluation reports documented that many of the beat meetings did not go according to plan—beat officers often did not assume their intended

leadership role, too many meetings floundered without a clear agenda, and not much crime information was shared. Later attempts were made to remedy this, and during March and April 1998—just before the observations began—the department conducted training for civilian beat activists, beat officers, and sergeants that included sessions on how to conduct more productive beat meetings.

## The ideal beat meeting

One goal of the new observation study was to examine how closely activities in the field reflected the plans made downtown. To do this, observers gathered information on the elements of a “model meeting” and compiled a checklist of activities that included the factors constituting the program’s standards. Later, their observations were summed to rate the extent to which each meeting resembled an ideal gathering. The rating scale was based on 10 meeting components (table 2). Another goal of the new observation study was to determine whether any progress had been made in the way meetings were conducted. To examine this, the 1998 observations were matched to observations from a study conducted in 1995, when some but not all elements of a model meeting were also assessed.

Table 2: Components of a Model Meeting

<i>Agenda</i>	Was there a printed or verbal meeting agenda?	<i>Resident Feedback</i>	Did residents report back on previous problem-solving efforts?
<i>Information</i>	Were crime maps or crime reports handed out?	<i>Officer Feedback</i>	Did police officers report back on previous problem-solving efforts?
<i>Facilitator</i>	Was there a civilian facilitator for the meeting?	<i>Identification</i>	Were problems or issues identified at the meeting?
<i>Volunteers</i>	Were volunteers called for, or were signup sheets passed around?	<i>Solutions</i>	Were solutions proposed for problems that were identified?
<i>Action Component</i>	Did residents leave the meeting with a commitment to future action?	<i>Meeting Effectiveness</i>	Was the meeting run with overall effectiveness?

### Beat meeting observations

Observers assessed beat meeting “mechanics,” the extent to which Chicago’s problem-solving model was implemented, and efforts to sustain citizen participation.

**Beat meeting mechanics.** Some of the meeting components summarized in table 2 represent beat meeting mechanics. Observers reported there was a clear agenda, either printed or clearly announced, for 65 percent of the meetings. Under the department’s guidelines, each beat is supposed to have a civilian “facilitator” to help organize and conduct public events, and a facilitator actually was present at two-thirds of the meetings. Observers also judged the overall effectiveness with which the meetings were run and concluded that about one-fourth were poorly conducted. Almost 60 percent were managed fairly effectively, and 15 percent were judged to have been run very effectively. Officers who played leadership roles received somewhat higher marks than civilians. However, meetings led by civilians or jointly between police and residents were judged to be better run overall. There was also a fair degree of information sharing by police. Department guidelines call for crime information to be distributed at beat meetings, and this usually occurred. The department’s crime analysis system can produce a variety of reader-friendly maps, crime lists, and reports, and observers reported that either crime maps or printed crime reports were distributed at 70 percent of the meetings.

The 1998 figures on the mechanics of meetings represented a significant improvement over past observations. Among the matched beats, a clear agenda was provided for 64 percent of the meetings in 1998 but for only 41 percent of the meetings in 1995. No crime reports at all were distributed at 40 percent of the 1995 meetings, but by 1998 that figure had dropped to 24 percent. The availability of crime maps nearly doubled. These improvements may reflect the training that beat officers, sergeants, and civilian beat facilitators have received since 1995 on how to conduct beat meetings.

**Problem-solving model.** A great deal of variation was observed in the extent to which different elements of Chicago’s problem-solving model were enacted at beat meetings. All of the officers in

the department's patrol division have been trained to employ a five-step process that includes identifying and analyzing problems, developing and implementing solutions to them, and assessing the effectiveness of what they have accomplished. These problem-solving steps were also woven into the curriculum of the massive training program for neighborhood residents conducted in 1995 and 1996. The observers found that the most frequently met standard on the list presented in table 2 was the discussion of beat issues—all but one of the meetings involved identifying problems. Most problems were identified by the residents who were present, and police dominated the discussion of problems at only 14 percent of the meetings. Attendees also usually discussed how to solve problems. Observers noted that solutions were proposed for most of the problems discussed at 77 percent of the meetings. As in past observations, most solutions (45 percent) were proposed by police; residents proposed solutions 14 percent of the time and did so jointly with police at another 16 percent of the meetings. When solutions were actually discussed rather than just nominated, police were more likely to be involved than were residents.

Observations of the matched subset of beats indicated little change over time in the rate at which problems were identified at meetings or who identified them. Residents raised most of the problems discussed at 67 percent of the 1995 meetings and at 71 percent of the 1998 meetings. On the other hand, the observers noted *less* discussion of solutions to problems in 1998 than in 1995. The role played by residents remained about the same each time (they took the lead in about 15 percent of the matched meetings), but the contribution made by police declined. Overall, the percentage of meetings at which solutions to problems were discussed declined from 96 percent to 80 percent.

The evaluation reports have also stressed the importance of presenting followup reports at beat meetings concerning participants' problem-solving efforts. These followup reports serve several functions. They help clarify to participants that attending "pays off"—that they should attend because something actually happens as a result of the meetings. Reports on residents' problem-solving efforts help sustain participants'

enthusiasm for the process by recognizing their contributions and may encourage others to join in. Beat meetings also provide a forum for residents to hold beat officers accountable. Calling for reports on their efforts since the last meeting helps savvy residents ensure that police and city service agencies actually follow up on problems discussed at these sessions. The observers found that police contributed reports of their efforts fairly often; they reported on their problem-solving activities at 61 percent of the meetings. However, only 35 percent of the meetings featured residents discussing their own efforts.

**Citizen participation.** Because sustaining effective citizen participation in problem solving has proven to be difficult in many areas of Chicago, observers also noted the role of beat meetings in mobilizing participants. One factor they watched for was whether volunteers were requested, or whether signup sheets were distributed at the meetings to engage participants in particular activities. They found that this occurred at 39 percent of the meetings. Among the matched meetings, calls for volunteers declined by 4 percentage points between 1995 and 1998. Observers also made a critical summary judgment at the end of each session—that is, did residents leave the meeting with a commitment to future action? When participants leave knowing what needs to be done and their role in those efforts, beat meetings may have a greater impact than when there is no commitment to any clear action. Observers were to assess each meeting on the basis of calls for volunteers, announcements of other meetings or activities, and the action plans discussed. Based on these criteria, they judged that only 34 percent of the meetings met the standard of having an “action component.”

### Model-meeting index: What contributes to better meetings?

To summarize all of these factors, a model-meeting index was created by summing indicators of each of the 10 components listed in table 2. The index set a high standard by counting only the meetings judged to be “very effective”; otherwise, index components were either present or absent in each case. When the meeting elements were combined, the average meeting score was 5.6, and the median was 6. In short, the typical meeting met slightly more than half the criteria.



Across the beats, none of the meetings received a score of zero, and 4 percent received just 1 or 2 points. At the other end of the scale, 2 of the meetings received a perfect score, and 19 percent received a score of 8, 9, or 10.

Civilian leadership and high meeting attendance were found to contribute to better meetings.

**Civilian leadership.** One factor identified in past reports, civilian leadership, remains important in this research. Meetings chaired by civilians, or jointly with a police officer, more closely matched the model. Some police representatives did a good job. Among the components of the model-meeting index, civilian-led or jointly led meetings were more likely to have clear agendas, but so were the meetings run by sergeants (who have had the most training on the police side). Civilian-led meetings were more likely to include calls for volunteers, but so were those run by neighborhood relations officers (who are specialists in dealing with the community). Civilian-led or jointly led meetings were more likely to feature followup reports from civilians about their problem-solving activities, and they also were better at eliciting these reports from the police officers who were present (although sergeants were also good at that). However, only civilian-led meetings were consistently top rated. Generally, meetings run by ordinary beat officers were conducted the least effectively on all of these measures.

**Meeting attendance.** In addition, meetings attended by more people and meetings held in beats where the regular yearly pattern of attendance is high were also more likely to fit the model. Beats with low scores (ranging from 1 to 4) on the model-meeting index averaged 20 participants; those with high scores (7 to 10) averaged 30 participants. The total yearly attendance at the top-ranked beats (measured by official department records) averaged 77 percent higher than the bottom-ranked group. Meetings that included representatives of civic organizations, staff for local aldermen, community organizers, and city agency representatives also tended to “go by the book.” Meetings were also more likely to match the department’s standard in low-crime areas. Beats in the low-rated category (with scores of 1 to 4) had a

40-percent higher personal crime rate and a 46-percent higher property crime rate than those in the high-rated category. There appeared to be no differences associated with race; there was virtually no correlation between the racial composition of beats and their model-meeting index score.

It was also possible, using the onsite observations, to compare the races of the residents attending with those of the officers who were there. Observers noted no apparent effect of either a disparity between the two groups or racial homogeneity between police and residents on how beat meetings were conducted. However, meetings resembled the model more closely in residential areas, and beats with a heavy concentration of businesses or industry tended to score lower.

## Conclusion: Community Factors and Personal Contacts Are Key

Chicago's community policing initiative features a number of avenues for citizen participation, and, since its inception, citizen participation has been one of its most significant successes. A large proportion of the population is aware of CAPS, and that awareness grew among all major subgroups between 1996 and 1998. Expanding participation has proved to be more difficult than extending citizen awareness. Participation levels have grown slowly, averaging about 6,000 attendees per month, and the percentage of Chicagoans who report attending has remained at about 12 to 14 percent of adults. However, unlike many other programs across the Nation, turnout for CAPS has been sustained in many of the places needing it most. Attendance is relatively high in some of the city's poorest and most crime-ridden communities. Meeting attendance also did not decline when the novelty of CAPS wore off, as some feared it might. CAPS managers realize that awareness has probably peaked at about its current level and have shifted their focus to increasing the effectiveness of beat meetings and local problem-solving projects.

The surveys suggest that although television has been the principal force driving the increasing levels of program awareness, it does not appear to affect beat meeting attendance. Community factors and personal contacts play the largest role in stimulating actual participation; beat meeting attendance is strongly linked to involvement with groups that spread the word about CAPS, as are word-of-mouth discussions about the program and the fliers and newsletters that circulate easily in well-organized neighborhoods.

When they attend, residents like what they see—most thought beat meetings were productive and led to constructive action. Observers' conclusions were somewhat more pessimistic, based on a systematic checklist of standards pursued by the department. The average gathering was assessed to be good in meeting mechanics and in airing the issues but weak in finding solutions to problems, especially by residents, and in encouraging feedback about successes. The beat meetings are not yet providing a forum for holding either police or residents accountable for their efforts.

### Increasing utility through training

Chicago has instituted several new projects intended to increase the utility of beat meetings. Since the field work for this evaluation was completed, the police department has conducted new rounds of training for beat sergeants, civilian facilitators, and some patrol officers. New CAPS training has also been offered to lieutenants and watch commanders, key midlevel managers in the organization. A small team of civilian and sworn trainers is on hand to assist districts that need help in developing a problem-solving orientation and in conducting effective beat meetings. Since early 1998, the civilian side of the program has expanded significantly. A number of civilian organizers who have been hired and assigned to some of the city's most troubled beats have the mission of increasing meeting attendance and facilitating the development of local problem-solving projects.<sup>2</sup>

### Stimulating involvement through networking and organizational affiliations

This research suggests two other avenues for stimulating involvement and problem solving. The findings show that beat meeting participants who are *networked* with each other are more likely to attend frequently and to become involved in problem solving. When people recognize each other on the street, know each other's names, talk on the telephone, and socialize in other venues, they are more likely to become CAPS activists. This highlights the importance of developing "phone trees" and other participant directories, setting up meeting spaces so that participants can interact, and allowing time on the agenda for coffee or social hours so that residents can meet informally. This social networking, along with calling for volunteers or sending around signup sheets, is likely to increase the action potential of beat meetings.

More important is evidence of the effect of local organizations in advancing community policing. Residents linked to their neighbors by a web of organizational affiliations are more likely to hear about and turn out for beat meetings, to attend more often, and to become involved in problem solving. The concern of many that communities lacking an infrastructure of supportive organizations will fall behind in developing effective partnerships with police appears to be correct. The "civilian side" of community policing is indeed as problematic as the police side, calling for similar investments in developing organizational support for this new style of policing.

## Suggested Reading

Skogan, Wesley G. "Community Policing in Chicago," in *Community Policing*, ed. Geoffrey Alpert and Alex Piquero. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1997: 159–174.

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## Notes

1. Skogan, Wesley G., Susan M. Hartnett, Jill DuBois, Jennifer T. Comey, Marianne Kaiser, and Justine H. Lovig, *On the Beat: Police and Community Problem Solving*, Boulder, CO: Westview Publishing Co., 1999.

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