

Best Practices Guide

International Association of Chiefs of Police

Smaller Police Departments
Technical Assistance Program

Strategic Planning: *Building Strong Police-Community Partnerships in Small Towns*

by Chief David L. Kurz

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Best Practices Guide for Strategic Planning: Building Police-Community Partnerships in Small Towns

By Chief David L. Kurz, Durham, New Hampshire Police Department

Motivation for the Strategic Plan

When the police department in Durham, New Hampshire, wanted to develop a strategic plan there was an acknowledgement that the approach must be different from those of larger police agencies. While the number of demands upon the department could legitimately justify not even exploring the topic, the department still needed to establish long-term goals and develop a strategy that would ensure success. The Durham strategic plan project is comprised of three phases, 1) a survey of citizen satisfaction with police services, 2) an internal agency survey of police officer satisfaction and, 3) a one-day planning session attended by police officers and community leaders. Due to the strategic planning process, the agency has an evolving set of goals and corresponding plans to reach them with the renewed support and cooperation of the community it serves.

Benefits of the Strategic Plan

1. **Community Perceptions and Needs.** The Durham Police Department decided to treat its constituents as partners and customers. Like any business, it needed to identify its constituent's needs to know how to meet them. A Community Safety Survey was designed.
2. **Building Community Partners.** Community members often have questions about police services and how they're delivered. When constituents are familiar with police services, they are more likely to be supportive. The One-Day Community Planning Session has built strong community-police partnerships. Officers indicate the respect and cooperation they are receiving from the community has improved greatly since the strategic planning process was launched several years ago.
3. **Internal Agency Improvements.** Officers' responses to the agency's Internal Survey informed the chief more effectively about his officer's views and needs so that he could adequately respond.

Policing Durham:

Though the crime rate in Durham is among the lowest in the state, the town's police department nevertheless has its hands full. With 19 sworn officers and three support staff, the CALEA™ accredited police department serves a fluctuating population comprised of 8,700 full-time citizens and 12,000 students of the University of New Hampshire (UNH). The unique policing environment demands a balance between supporting the desires of the permanent residents and students. In many ways, the community is dominated by the UNH school year. Policing in this environment becomes extremely demanding commencing at school opening in September until Homecoming Weekend in late October. These new students are strangers to the area, have never been away from home, do not know their classmates, often make bad decisions with strangers and often abuse a variety of substances. Experimentation with alcohol dominates the social scene. In many ways,

the officers are challenged with allowing students appropriate flexibility while responding to the concerns and demands of the permanent residents simultaneously.

Durham residents have come to expect professional and personal response to their calls for service, and the department has long maintained a good relationship with the community. But there was reason for concern when a citizens' group told the new police chief that the residents saw the department as distant from the people it served. The chief decided that if the police department wanted to improve public perceptions of the police, it needed to improve community partnerships and work together with those partners to change their image and way of doing business. The department determined to treat its constituents as partners and customers and like any good business, find out what its customers wanted.

Treating Police Constituents as Valued Customers

One value of embracing a business philosophy for a police agency is that it makes the public the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes quality policing. Community Policing is a philosophy that calls for police and community cooperation to determine the problems and desires of the community and subsequently to develop a strategy that will address those needs. Community policing also reinvigorates the community's sense of responsibility for maintaining law and order. The same is true with public safety - law enforcement is ultimately responsible for protecting the public, but good community policing empowers citizens to do their part.

Citizens today often question their local government about service levels, budget limitations, and community involvement. It is no surprise then, that communities have questions for their police managers about what services their police departments provide and how they deliver them. It behooves police chiefs to take the lead in providing the answers. An environment that encourages discussion and allows for community feedback is the foundation of any community policing initiative. The development of a strategic plan helped the Durham Police Department create such an environment.

Initiating the Strategic Planning Process

Unsure of how to launch a strategic planning initiative, the Durham Police Department began by doing some research. It found that most of the literature on the subject suggested that strategic planning was time consuming, sapped limited human resources and was just too involved for a small police agency like Durham to initiate. Nevertheless, the department felt that strategic planning would help to reveal the road the organization should take and it embraced some of the basic principles of the business world, such as soliciting and valuing client comments, monitoring performance, promoting continuous improvement and inviting worker participation. The agency launched its strategic planning initiative with a community survey, certain these methods could help the police achieve high levels of customer satisfaction.

Phase One: Community Survey

Determining Community Perception. Community surveys offer police a significant opportunity of finding out the answers to these questions

- 1) How do our customers perceive crime in the community
- 2) How does crime affect them?
- 3) How does the community perceive the police department?

Several strategies that Durham Police Department has employed to ease the challenges of development, distribution and analysis of the responses are:

1. **Existing Surveys.** Look for existing surveys at the IACP, where a number of examples are on line at <http://www.theiacp.org/profassist/surveydurham.htm>. Another excellent resource is found at the Office of Community Oriented Policing at the Department of Justice. Durham's survey employs fifty questions to gauge customer satisfaction with the police force, concerns about crime and quality-of-life perceptions. To ensure that survey responses will allow for conclusions to be easily measured, use a rating scale of 1 to 5, yes or no, or true or false. If questions demand a diverse, write-in answer, quantifying the responses will be very difficult and time consuming.
2. **Mailing Tips.** To save limited funding, Durham's initial survey was distributed as an insert in the annual town report. Other possibilities may exist in your community by inquiring with other municipal departments about up-coming community-wide mailings. To encourage responses, the questionnaire is designed to be folded so that the pre-paid and self-addressed card keeps the response process simple. Checking with the Post Office about bulk mailing charges lead to a significant savings with mailed responses. Recognizing that not all surveys will be returned, and not wanting to place an expensive stamp on each, Durham chose an option whereby only those surveys mailed back would be billed. While the postage was about 20% more, Durham only paid for those mailed.
3. **Enlisting Help.** There are untapped resources in every community that are more than willing to assist you in what can be a labor intensive process. As host community to the University of New Hampshire, Durham gained the assistance of Professor Andrew E. Smith and students at the UNH Survey Center in the development, distribution and analysis of the survey. There are often active retirement associations willing to offer assistance with mailings and correlating the data. Possibly working with a political science class at the local high school will not only provide an excellent resource but also create a very different opportunity for the agency's interaction with kids.
4. **Rate of Return.** Durham's initial survey in 1997 had only 17 percent of the 1,700 surveys completed and returned for analysis. When the department repeated the survey in 2003, local newspaper articles informed the community of the survey's repeat appearance. There was an emphasize on the results of the previous survey and the programs implemented as a result of the citizen's opinions. The community recognized immediately that this was not just an exercise in public relations but a real desire to learn from the completed surveys. The return rate vaulted dramatically to over 47 percent.

Durham's Survey Results. The survey asks respondents to rate the department as excellent, good, fair, or poor. In 2003, 96 percent of respondents rated the department as good or excellent. The community survey asks respondents whether they would hesitate to call the Durham Police Department for assistance, whether the department is responsive to residents' needs, whether they have considered moving from Durham because of crime, and whether they have changed their activities due to fear of crime.

The survey allows respondents to report how safe they feel home alone at night, walking downtown at night, walking through their neighborhood at night, and walking through their neighborhood during the day. They are asked whether they feel crime has decreased, increased, or remained the same during the past year. The survey also gives respondents the opportunity to identify their level of concern about specific crimes and issues during the daytime and at night. According to survey results in 2003, Durham's greatest concerns include children's exposure to drugs, home burglary, and the safety of children. A majority of respondents saw jaywalking, parking/traffic, and speeding as significant community problems.

Phase Two: Internal Survey

Determining Agency Perceptions. Once the community survey was completed, some officers expressed concern that “no one is asking us our opinion.” The chief recognized the importance of empowering the employees whose hard work would determine the success of the initiative. Inspired by an internal survey from a neighboring community, the chief adapted the internal survey that was designed to garner the opinions and perceptions of the Durham staff.

Gathering Responses. The internal survey is similar to the community survey and focuses on the employee’s perceptions and opinions of the agency. Every shift supervisor was instructed to give employees an opportunity to complete the document while on-duty. Familiarity by the Chief with each employee’s handwriting may be unique to small agencies. To encourage candid responses that would offer the most value, the survey was placed on each of the department’s computer desktop allowing the survey to be completed and printed in a Word™ format.

The survey asked officers to consider each of the following agency functions separately: administration, first-line supervision, patrol, vehicle and equipment maintenance, computerization, and accreditation. Officers rated each component’s effectiveness, philosophy, leadership, policy development, and support to other components. The survey also invited officers to write narrative explanations of the ratings and make suggestions for improving the department in response to questions such as these:

1. What would you change about this function if you were the chief of police?
2. What challenges does this function currently face and what challenges will it face in the future?

The responses to the survey were more instructive than individual conversations with officers could have been, just as riding in a police car with an officer tells a chief more about that officer than he could learn during a two-hour interview in the chief’s office. The exercise allowed the chief of police to eliminate incorrect perceptions that his CALEA assessment travels, for instance, were using limited department travel funds. The chief was able to quickly inform the staff that he utilized vacation time and that all costs associated with the assessments were paid for by CALEA with no department funds utilized. Clearing these and similar misperceptions helped to build agency trust and improve morale.

Phase Three: One-Day Community Planning Session

Engaging Constituents. The third phase of Durham’s strategic planning initiative was a one-day planning session, which brought police officers together with community leaders and citizens for a candid conversation about police services. There were several goals for the session, including teaching officers the value of asking the community what it wanted from its police force and showing the townspeople that the department valued their opinions. The department also designed the program to give civilians a clearer picture of the services the department provides and to provide officers an opportunity to improve their skills as public speakers and facilitators.

The Design. The department wanted to reach the widest possible audience and at the same time limit the group to a reasonable size. Invitations were sent to the members of the town council, the chamber of commerce, the school board, the ecumenical council, and the high school’s student senate. Also invited were the district court judge, chairpersons of town boards, members of organizations with a history of community commitment, including the Lions, the Rotary Club, and the Knights of Columbus, and area clergy, defense attorneys, business leaders, and media representatives. Since the community is so connected to the University of New Hampshire, student senators and officials from the university were also invited to participate. The group included 25 active participants.

Agenda Overview. The morning meeting featured presentations by officers responsible for drug enforcement, juvenile investigations, school resource officers, training, patrol, and accreditation. Support staff talked about the idiosyncrasies of record management, accident reports, parking ticket appeals, and ancillary budget items highlighting their important roles in the organization. A newly hired officer who had previously worked for another agency discussed the selection process in Durham and emphasized how the Field Training Officer program (FTO) emphasized the agency’s commitment to the community.

Presenters were charged with presenting a thumbnail sketch of their duties and of the problems they have faced as they carry out those duties. Wherever possible, they were to highlight the ways they had creatively resolved those problems. Officers volunteered to be presenters. The chief, acting as emcee, welcomed attendees and introduced each officer, being sure to mention something unique about each officer’s professional and personal lives. The personal touches served to remind everyone that officers are human beings, too.

One-Day Planning Session Sample Agenda

8:30 – Strategic Planning Participants Networking Session and Continental Breakfast

Welcoming Presentation by Chief David Kurz

9:00 – 12:00 Presentations

Topic	Presenter
1. Adopt A Cop Program	Sgt. David Holmstock
2. Use of Force	Sgt. Frank Daly
	Ofc. Kathryn Lilly
3. Selection Process/FTO	Ofc. Joe Gagnon
4. Investigations: The “Snipper” Case	Det. Mike Bilodeau
Evidence Preservation and Handling	Det. Gabe Tarrants
5. Drug Enforcement	Det. Sean Dolliver
6. School Resource Officer/Juvenile Matters	Sgt. Ed Levesque
7. Parking Enforcement	PEO Dick Martin
8. Patrol and Traffic Enforcement	Ofc. Ed Pike
9. The Front Office	Mrs. Jen Johnson
10. Accreditation	Lt. Sean Kelly
11. Prosecution	Mrs. Dawn Mitchell
Deputy Chief Rene Kelley	
12. School Opening and Closing	Deputy Chief Rene Kelley
Red Sox and Patriots Preparations	

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch

1:00 – End Deliberative Session Chief David Kurz

Among the morning's highlights was a presentation on DWI enforcement that included a video of a DWI traffic stop, a field test, and arrest. The officer explained what indicators of intoxication he is trained to look for and how he handles various elements of the traffic stop.

Another highlight was a video and discussion of a number of "celebratory riots" involving more than 5,000 college students. There were significant discussions about the police preparations necessary to deal with large disruptive crowds that included mutual-aid assistance from agencies in several surrounding communities.

After the individual presentations, the officers led a tour of the police facility allowing the townspeople to see how their tax dollars support the town's modern law enforcement complex. After lunch, the chief led the attendees in a discussion about the department's future plans. Citizens shared feedback on police services and offered their views on the department's goals.

As a token of its appreciation, the department gave each participant a golf shirt embroidered with the words "Durham Police-Community Partner." Quite by accident, the shirts turned out to be an exceptional public marketing tool. One business owner joking that he would never wear the shirt again while he was at work reported that customers at his hardware store wanted to know more about what the department was doing then buying items at his store. To Durham Police Department's benefit, the new "community partners" were sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm about the department to their peers, friends and customers.

Naturally, the planning session made considerable demands on department resources. Everyone from the chief to junior officers pitched in to make the meeting run smoothly by setting up chairs, arranging for projectors and taking care of assorted other details. In an endeavor such as this one, the employees who volunteer to assume the greatest levels of responsibility will likely be the agency's future leaders. Empowering every employee to take an active role in such an enterprise, what the chief of a small department must do of necessity, allows the chief to observe the capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses of the staff. The agency benefits from the Community Planning Session in countless ways.

Phase Four

Completion of the Strategic Plan. Armed with its findings from the surveys and the planning session, and bolstered by the renewed good will of its constituents, the Durham Police Department set out to draft its strategic plan, specifically designed to be revisited annually. The department describes its objectives in the introduction to the 2005 strategic plan:

The Durham Police Department 2005 Strategic Plan is designed to be an evolving document, constantly reviewed, updated and brought into line with the desires of the community. It is the culmination of a series of exercises all designed to ensure that the vision, mission, and objectives of the agency are successfully achieved. The plan ensures that the elements within this document is understood, supported and reflects the wishes of the community. An outgrowth of this process is the enhanced ability to effectively manage resources, provide accountability through measured results and adjust to change. Successful planning requires the fortitude to change course when opportunities and community demands arise. Ultimately, it is the planning process itself that keeps the agency focused on what the organization wishes to accomplish and the best route to ensure success.

Design of the Strategic Plan. The plan comprises eight long-term objectives; for each one, the plan identifies a performance indicator, target dates for the achievement of a series of short-term goals, and a list of strategies the department will employ toward achieving the objective. The police department's objectives for the period beginning in fiscal year 2005 and ending in fiscal year 2010 are as follows:

2005 Agency Objectives

1. Reduce the incidence of crime
2. Increase quality of service and customer satisfaction
3. Increase availability of grants and alternative funding sources
4. Maintain status as an internationally accredited law enforcement agency
5. Comprehensive equipment replacement program
6. Provide high-quality training for all agency personnel
7. Increase diversity of agency personnel
8. Maintain acceptable workload for police officers

The department distributes copies of the strategic plan throughout Durham. Each member of the town council receives a copy. One copy is posted for public viewing in the lobby of the Durham Town Hall, another in the lobby of the police station. The department mails a copy of the plan and a letter of thanks to each of the participants in the one-day planning session.

Example Objective, Performance Indicator, Targets, and Strategies

Objective. Maintain status as an internationally accredited law enforcement agency

Accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) is based upon 443 professional standards developed by a coalition of police managers and professional organizations. The voluntary program provides guidance in the development of policies and procedures. Additionally, they furnish the organization with a proven management system of written directives as well as the ability to determine short and long-term goal setting. Accreditation embodies the precepts of community-oriented policing as it fosters an environment whereby the community and the police work collaboratively addressing problems.

Performance Indicator. We have met all of our goals in this category. The agency has been accredited under the CALEA format as well as the New Hampshire system since 1999. In April of 2005, three police professionals from out-of-state police departments will inspect our documents and practices, confirming that we have adhered to applicable standards for the past three-years. They will issue a report of their findings, which will be reviewed at the Boston, Massachusetts meeting by the entire Commission. It is our goal that their findings and confirmation that this agency has institutionalized the standards as a “life-style” demonstrating our commitment to delivering professional, cost-effective services to the community, will result in the agency being re-accredited for an additional three-years.

Targets.

2006 Maintain accreditation with documents and actions that demonstrate compliance

2007 Maintain accreditation with documents and actions that demonstrate compliance

2008	Prepare for a re-accreditation visit by assessors in April who will inspect the agency files and produce a report that will be reviewed by the full commission in a city to be named later.
2009	Maintain accreditation with documents and actions that demonstrate compliance.
2010	Maintain accreditation with documents and actions that demonstrate compliance

Strategies.

1. Provide training for all department members that ensures compliance with all applicable standards
2. Develop public forums that allow for interaction with the community ensuring compliance
3. Proceed with self-assessment of agency methodology and policy
4. Develop an operational plan that will assist the agency in successfully passing an on-site inspection
5. Foster the philosophy of accreditation and institutionalize as a “life-style”

From the Durham, New Hampshire, Police Department’s 2005 Strategic Plan

The Benefit of Improved Partnerships

Thanks in large part to the strategic plan and the spirit of cooperation that marked each phase of its development; the town of Durham now has a better understanding of the mission, values, goals, and strategies of the police department. Remarks made on subsequent community surveys and during the one-day planning sessions have shown that townspeople appreciate and are more aware of how the police department functions and what police officers do. There is also more community support for the department and the officers.

Improved community partnerships and agency morale are indicators of the benefits of designing and implementing our strategic plan. The inclusive process to develop the strategic plan, and the plan itself, sends the message that the department actively seeks to know the kind and quality of police services the town desires. It also makes clear that the department is committed to improving its approval ratings and meeting those needs. What’s more, officers report that they are receiving a greater level of respect, acknowledgment, and cooperation from residents since the department launched the strategic plan initiative.

About the Author

Chief David L. Kurz has served in law enforcement since 1974 and as the Chief of Police in Durham, New Hampshire, since 1996 (19 officers). He obtained a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Southern Maine, has taken a number of courses for a Masters Degree in Public Administration, and is also a graduate of the FBI National Academy. Prior to accepting the position of chief in Durham, New Hampshire, Chief Kurz was Deputy Director of Maine Drug Enforcement Agency. There he supervised operational and support services for statewide drug enforcement efforts that included covert undercover drug purchases, intelligence gathering, asset removal and supervision of a drug diversion unit. Chief Kurz is a contributing author to IACP Police Chief magazine, Big Ideas for Smaller Police Departments newsletter, and other periodicals on issues ranging from New Technology Acquisition to Strategic Planning. His professional affiliations include the New England Chiefs of Police, Maine and New Hampshire Chiefs Associations, Police Executive Research Forum, and he currently serves as a Team Leader for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). His experience with and advocacy for smaller departments make him an effective teacher and consultant. For the past 7 years, he has served IACP as an advisor for the *Services, Support and Technical Assistance for Smaller Police Departments Project* in the Research Center Directorate.