

How Effective is Community Policing? The Impact of the Comprehensive Communities Program in Phoenix's Coronado Neighborhood

by:

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Community policing — “a collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems” (U.S. Department of Justice, **Understanding Community Policing: A Framework for Action** 1994, p. vii) — is not new to the City of Phoenix Police Department (PD). They adopted this philosophy in the early 1990s. In 1995, they sought to expand community policing in Phoenix by applying for, and receiving, a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to implement the Comprehensive Communities Program (CCP) — a project designed to implement community policing in an urban neighborhood and demonstrate its potential.¹

With planning starting in October 1995, and implementation occurring throughout 1996, the CCP first established a community partnership. Partners comprised various City of Phoenix departments (i.e., the police department, Neighborhood Services Department, Mayor's Office, and Department of Parks, Recreation and Libraries), the Greater Coronado Neighborhood Association (GCNA), and community-based agencies and other organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, Mothers Against Gangs, FAXNET 1, and the Maricopa County Juvenile Courts and Adult Probation Department.

In response to perceived community needs, the partnership designed four initiatives that they felt would deter crime and enforce prosecution in the Coronado neighborhood. These initiatives focused on strengthening community policing in the neighborhood, mobilizing the community against crime, working with neighborhood youth and gang members, and working with adult offenders. Another feature of the CCP involved partners in deciding how best to evaluate the program. Partners were encouraged to examine program services and assess the program effectiveness by using tools such as self-evaluation and reflection. Technical

assistance to CCP program collaborators on evaluation was provided by Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

Toward the beginning of the project, partners decided on four measures to evaluate the program's impact on the Coronado neighborhood and on the partnership itself. Ultimately, three measures were derived. One desired measure— relating specifically to juvenile crime —was abandoned due to difficulties in reporting and retrieving data.

This briefing paper summarizes the measures used in the CCP evaluation and briefly examines whether results answer the question: Is community policing effective? More specifically, it focuses on whether the Comprehensive Communities Program resulted in outcomes desired by neighborhood residents. That is—Did crime go down? Do residents feel more safe? Does a formal partnership between the police and a neighborhood make a difference?

Measures of Effectiveness

Overall crime: CCP partners chose to examine the number of violent and nonviolent crimes committed within the geographic boundaries of the Coronado Neighborhood as a whole both before and after implementing CCP. The plan was to compare Coronado's crime statistics with those for the City of Phoenix. The Phoenix PD assumed responsibility for collecting these data. Ultimately, crime statistics for an adjacent neighborhood, Garfield, were also provided to allow another basis for comparison.

Table 1

Index crimes per 1,000 population: Coronado compared with Garfield and the City of Phoenix

	Pre-CCP implementation		CCP year	1994-95	1995-96
	1994	1995	1996	Change	Change
Violent Crime—Coronado	28.6	31.1	30.2	+2.5	-0.9
Garfield	27.2	28.9	31.8	+1.7	+2.9
Phoenix	10.7	11.2	13.2	+0.5	+2.0
Nonviolent Crime—Coronado	225.5	248.9	222.4	+23.4	-26.5
Garfield	133.0	136.4	121.8	+3.4	-14.6
Phoenix	102.9	114.1	106.2	+11.2	-7.9

Calculations per 1,000 based on 1990 Census figures

Table 1 depicts crime statistics per 1,000 residents for the Coronado neighborhood compared with Garfield and the City of Phoenix. Violent crimes include homicide, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault. Nonviolent, or property, crimes include burglary, theft and auto theft.

Table 1 provides statistics for 1994 and 1995—the years prior to implementing the CCP—and for 1996—CCP’s implementation year. Changes in crime rates are also provided. The table indicates that for Coronado, Garfield, and the City of Phoenix as a whole, both violent and nonviolent crime rose between 1994 and 1995. It also shows that during this time period, crime in Coronado is high compared to both Garfield and Phoenix..

Between 1995 and 1996, violent crime in Garfield and Phoenix rose. In contrast, the Coronado neighborhood’s violent crime rate dropped slightly. both neighborhoods, and Phoenix, nonviolent crimes rates dropped between 1995 and 1996. In Coronado, they dropped significantly—nearly 27 percent—almost double the decline in the neighboring Garfield area.

In addition to the statistics shown in Table 1, the Phoenix Police Department compiled trend data for the Coronado neighborhood on drug crimes, gang-related crimes and domestic violence. Reported in raw numbers, data reveal that from 1995 to 1996:

- Drug crimes dropped 7.9% in the neighborhood compared with an 50.7% increase between 1994 and 1995.

- Gang-related crimes dropped 12.1% compared with an 8.3% decline between 1994 and 1995.
- Domestic violence dropped 22.0% compared with a 49.0% increase between 1994 and 1995.

By comparison, during the year that the CCP was implemented in Coronado, drug crimes in Garfield rose 37.1%, gang-related incidents rose 22.2%, and domestic violence decreased 7.5%.

Neighborhood residents’ perceptions of crime:

Another impact measure that CCP partners felt was important was residents’ perceptions of crime and safety. With the assistance of Morrison Institute staff, a 28-question survey was developed which, in addition to measuring residents' perceptions of crime, examined their knowledge of the CCP and involvement in community policing activities (e.g., Block Watch). The Greater Coronado Neighborhood Association assumed responsibility for conducting the survey. The association planned to use results as a baseline for annual comparison.

A total of 315 surveys were administered door-to-door by neighborhood residents, volunteers, and police officers. Results were compiled by Morrison Institute staff. Results are statistically accurate within a 90% level of confidence (with a margin of error not exceeding ± 5.6 percentage points).

Respondents represent Coronado residents from 90% of the neighborhood’s subdivisions. Roughly half were males and half were females (42.5% and 45.4%, respectively; 12.1% were not recorded by gender). About half (50.2%) have lived in the

neighborhood less than five years, while the other half have lived in Coronado more than five years. All ethnic/racial groups are represented, with a majority of respondents being white (46%) followed by Hispanics (34%).

One series of questions sought to determine the extent to which Coronado residents felt or were victimized by criminal activity. Table 2 shows the extent of Coronado residents' victimization by activity. Excluding "hearing shooting or loud noises," Table 2 indicates that over half of all respondents have, at some time in the part year, been the victim of at least one criminal activity. In light of these findings, it is noteworthy that of all the residents surveyed, only 97—or 30.8% of the respondents— said they reported the incident to the police.

Table 2
Reported victimization of Coronado residents
(N = 315)

Event	%
Heard shooting/loud noises	71.4
Had property damaged	56.2
Were victimized inside one's home	20.0
"Other"	13.7
Were attacked in the neighborhood	12.4
Had car stolen	9.5

Residents also were asked the extent to which they worried about their safety in their homes and neighborhood. Responses suggest that four of every 10 residents (39.7%) feel safe in their *homes*, compared to 31.7% who feel safe in Coronado *parks*, and 23.2% who feel safe *walking at night*.

What activities appear to contribute to residents' fear for safety? Gang-related and drug activities, and graffiti, are perceived as either major or minor problems by nearly three-quarters of the population surveyed (71.1% in all cases). Nearly half of the respondents (49.5%) also report prostitution as a major or minor problem.

The above findings suggest relatively high degrees of victimization and fear or worry about crime among Coronado residents. Nevertheless, over one-third of the respondents (34.6%) indicated that

criminal activity is less than it was one year ago, while 41.9% said it was "about the same." Only 20% of the respondents felt that crime was worse than it was prior to the inception of the CCP.

Another series of questions were designed to determine residents' awareness of CCP and the extent of their involvement in community policing efforts. Over one-third of the residents (35.6%) had heard of CCP—most as a result of reading about it in the neighborhood newsletter. On the other hand, 60.3% knew nothing about the program. Similarly, about one-third of the respondents reported knowing their neighborhood police officer (NPO) either by appearance or by name (35.2), while 62.5% indicated not knowing their NPO at all.

Residents were asked whether they had been involved in activities designed to mobilize residents against crime. A majority of residents reported not participating in any of the activities surveyed. However, among residents who reported being involved:

- 26.3% said they participated in the "Block Watch" program;
- 24.1% said they participated in the neighborhood association (i.e., GCNA);
- 20.6% said they had attended at least one neighborhood activity; and
- 1.9% said they were involved in the "Block Watchers on Patrol" program.

Finally, residents were asked—if they had *not* participated in any of the above activities—whether they would like to receive information about them. Over one hundred respondents indicated that they *would* be interested in receiving further information and, especially, that they were interested in meeting their neighborhood police officer.

Strength of the collaboration: Finally, CCP partners decided to examine the impact of the program in terms of their own perceptions of the project and partnership. Morrison Institute staff assessed partners' perceptions of the CCP at the beginning and end of the implementation year (i.e., January and December 1996) — see Table 3 (insert).

Overall, CCP partners' understanding of and support for the project increased measurably from beginning to end. On 14 of 25 questions, responses indicate more positive perceptions of the project and its goals, operations, and management at the end of

the project than at the beginning. Results for one question (#20) remained constant over time, indicating that a majority of partners had and maintained a respect for and understanding of members of the partnership.

On nine questions, there were higher percentages of partners at the end of the project than at the beginning who were *uncertain* about or *disagreed* with things such as the project's intended outcomes, its duration, interagency communication, their own or their agency's commitment to the project, their ability and opportunities to affect group decision-making, and their comfort in redefining the project, if necessary. Despite increases in percentages of uncertainty or disagreement, most partners did respond positively to all of the above issues.

Notably, one question (#11) was designed to detect whether partners share a sense of ownership and interdependence for a project's success. From beginning to end, responses indicate a shift in attitudes among partners *from* a greater sense of interdependence *to* a greater sense of autonomy.

In interpreting CCP survey results, it is important to note that many of the agency representatives who participated in the post-implementation survey were assigned to the project after its inception. That is, staff turnover throughout the year was relatively high and may contribute to higher degrees of uncertainty or disagreement noted in the post-survey than in the pre-survey. This suggests at least one aspect of program implementation that appears to warrant attention in the future—new players in a project need to be briefed about a project, its goals, and its history in order to avoid unnecessary confusion.

Discussion

Was the Comprehensive Communities Project effective? This section reviews the evidence, based upon measures of “effectiveness” determined to be important to neighborhood residents. Table 1 shows that both violent and nonviolent crime dropped in Coronado during the year of CCP implementation. This is noteworthy, given that similar trends are *not* observed in either the adjacent Garfield neighborhood or the City of Phoenix.

The resident survey suggests that although many residents were the victims of crime and are concerned about problems in their neighborhood,

over one-third felt that crime had abated in the past year. Furthermore, between one-quarter and one-third knew about the CCP, knew their NPO, and had taken *some* action to become involved in their neighborhood (e.g., as through the Block Watch program). While definitive conclusions cannot be drawn from “baseline” results, it appears reasonable to assume that the CCP was a contributing factor to some residents' heightened sense of safety, and an increased awareness of and involvement in community policing.

Finally, the formal partnership between police and community members appears to have been a positive experience for a majority of those involved. As testimony to the strength of the partnership, CCP partners received additional funding and are still actively pursuing community policing efforts.

In sum, evaluation results suggest that the CCP had a positive impact on the Coronado community. Crime dropped, residents' fear is not disproportionately high, community involvement is evident, and relationships between police and residents are positive.

In their publication, *Understanding Community Policing* (1994), the U.S. Department of Justice notes: “Creating a constructive partnership will require the energy, creativity, understanding and patience of all involved.” The City of Phoenix police, Coronado residents, and other agencies, and organizations appear to have created a constructive—and effective—partnership. The challenge, now, is to maintain it.

¹The Comprehensive Communities Program is described in greater detail the Morrison Institute briefing paper *Uniting the Community in Combating Crime: Community Policing in Phoenix and the Coronado Neighborhood* (Fernandez, Vandegrift and Humphrey, October 1996).

This briefing paper was produced on behalf of the Comprehensive Communities Program for the Phoenix Police Department.

For more information about the CCP, contact Lieutenant Kim Humphrey, Central City Precinct, 602-495-5005.

Table 3

The City of Phoenix Comprehensive Communities Program: Partners' Assessment of the CCP and Partnership

	Start of implementation year (January 1996)			End of implementation year (December 1996)		
	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1. The project was planned based on documented needs.	56.3	37.5	6.3	92.9	7.1	0.0
2. I can easily state the purpose of this project.	75.0	12.5	12.5	85.7	14.3	0.0
3. I have a clear idea of community-based policing.	75.0	18.8	6.3	92.9	7.1	0.0
4. I can state what the project is intended to accomplish.	68.8	25.0	6.3	64.3	35.7	0.0
5. Project goals are measurable and achievable.	37.5	50.0	12.5	50.0	35.7	14.3
6. Project activities are all designed to achieve the project's outcomes.	37.5	56.3	6.3	71.4	28.6	0.0
7. Financial resources are adequate to support this project's mission.	43.8	56.3	0.0	78.6	14.3	7.1
8. The project is for 15 months.	93.8	6.3	0.0	78.6	21.0	0.0
9. My organization's policies are not affected by this grant.	56.3	18.8	25.0	64.3	21.4	14.2
10. I can name all the partners in the project and describe their respective roles.	37.8	18.8	43.8	50.0	35.7	14.3
11. I/my organization can be successful independently of other project components.	37.5	12.5	50.0	57.1	14.3	28.6
12. My organization has complete fiscal control over our share of the grant budget.	50.0	31.3	18.8	69.3	23.1	0.0
13. I/my organization am/is committed to this effort even if the members, activities, and funding change.	100.0	0.0	0.0	91.9	7.1	0.0
14. The project has sufficient means of communication to keep all members informed.	75.0	18.8	6.3	71.4	14.3	14.2
15. The project has clearly-defined mechanisms for identifying problems and resolving conflicts.	43.8	43.8	12.5	57.1	28.6	14.3
16. This project has ways of dealing with barriers such as turf issues and denial.	25.0	56.3	18.8	50.0	42.0	7.1

Table 3
CCP Partners' Assessment of the CCP and Partnership—continued

	Beginning of implementation (January 1996)			End of implementation (December 1996)		
	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
17. All members share a sense of responsibility for the success or failure of the project as a whole.	75.0	25.0	0.0	57.2	28.6	14.3
18. There are adequate opportunities for discussions on key issues and input on issues affecting the project.	75.0	25.0	0.0	78.6	14.3	7.1
19. I feel that my opinions and input are valued and are contributing to group decision-making.	100.0	0.0	0.0	85.7	14.3	0.0
20. I respect and understand the role of other members of this partnership.	93.8	6.3	0.0	92.9	7.1	0.0
21. I feel respected and that my role is understood by other members of this partnership.	62.5	37.5	0.0	78.6	31.4	0.0
22. There is a strong commitment from the top level of my organizations for this project.	100.0	0.0	0.0	85.7	14.3	0.0
23. There is adequate representation from all parts of the community who are affected by this project.	31.0	43.8	25.0	71.4	14.3	14.2
24. Specific steps have been taken to consider cultural, racial, and ethnical differences and similarities in planning CCP strategies.	43.8	25.0	31.3	85.7	7.1	7.1
25. I am open to and comfortable with redefining this project if it is in the best interests of the community.	100.0	0.0	0.0	92.9	7.1	0.0

Shading indicates most notable changes between January and December of the implementation year

Notes: Agree = Agree + Strongly Agree; Disagree = Disagree + Strongly Disagree
 Numbers of respondents vary between assessment periods.
 (Percentages do not always total 100 due to rounding.)