Chapter 4

Public Relations and Community Relations: A Contrast

- Police-community relations programs have been built on already existing public relations programs.
- However, though community relations and public relations may be related, they are by no means the same.
- The differences become apparent when the two are compared with reference to their purposes.

Public Relations
- Designed to create a favorable environment for agency operations.
- Enhancing the police image.
- The target is a citizen who passively accepts what the police department is doing.
- There is no feedback or input.
Community Relations

- Involved citizens actively determining what and how police services will be provided to the community.
- Establish ongoing mechanisms for resolving problems of mutual interest to the community and the police.
- Provides feedback and input.

Public Relations and/or Community Relations

- There has been little agreement on what police-community relations is.
- Considerable confusion exists as to what community relations should accomplish and how they should do so.
- It is, however, accepted that police-community relations as a separate operational concept originated in the St. Louis Police Department in 1957.

Since that time, police-community relations has experienced sporadic growth.
- This rapid growth resulted from the violent confrontations of the mid to late 1960s.
- The creation of specialized units, or the assignment of so-called community relations duties to specific officers.
It was widely felt that such specialized responsibilities could help improve communications between increasingly activist minority groups and the police.

The primary goal of such units was usually to serve as go betweens, interpreting the attitudes, desires, and intentions of minority citizens and police agencies to each other.

The concept of community policing has now added new meaning to the traditional understanding of police-community relations in the 1990s and beyond.

The community policing philosophy broadens the scope of police-community interactions from a narrow focus devoted exclusively to crime to an examination of community concerns such as the fear of crime, disorder of all types, neighborhood decay, and crime prevention.

There is a definite relationship between community relations and public relations.

It is important to recognize their differences and to practice both concepts in a way that will meet the needs of the contemporary police agency most effectively.
Define Community Relations

- Community-Police relations is a philosophy of administering and providing police services, which embodies all activities within a given jurisdiction aimed at involving members of the community and the police in the determination of:
  - What police services will be provided
  - How they will be provided
  - How the police and members of the community will resolve common problems

Define Public Relations

- The business of inducing the public to have understanding for and goodwill toward a person, firm or institution. (Webster)
- Various definitions, however common elements;
  - those activities that attempt to explain agency goals and operations to the public
  - gain support for those goals and operations

Common Framework for Analyzing Community and Public Relations

- They are related and both properly part of police activity, and the differences between community and public relations should be understood.
- A useful analytical framework for this purpose focuses on three characteristics:
  - The purpose of the activity,
  - The process involved in the activity,
  - The extent of citizen involvement.
The Purpose of the Activity

- All police operations have, or should have, a stated purpose or goal.
- The purpose of an activity generally embodies the values that the police agency intends to live by.
- Purpose is an administrative guide.
- It answers the question: Why has this activity been designed?

Public Relations

- One common purpose of public relations activities is to develop and maintain a good environment in which to operate.
- This involves influencing attitudes in three areas of the environment:
  - The public
  - Politicians
  - Staff

- In order to achieve this purpose, the police must minimize obstacles and encourage support.
- The obstacles result from conscious opposition to what the police:
  - Have done
  - Are doing
  - Plan to do
A strongly held value in our culture is that the informed and educated citizen is the best participant in democratic government.

The theory is that if people understand why an agency performs as it does, they will be supportive of their performance.

Promoting a positive image is a logical extension of public information activity.

Police need to promote a positive image of themselves whenever possible.

This is done by stressing the “helping” and “emergency” attributes of the police role.

Community relations programs can share purpose and sub-purposes with public relations efforts.

Community relations efforts are geared toward integrating community forces and law enforcement agencies into active partnerships.

The philosophy of community relations stresses the interrelationships and mutual dependencies of police agencies and citizens.

The police must depend upon the community as a source of their legitimacy.

Protecting and serving must be defined in terms of the community’s needs and wishes in order for the police function to be legitimate.

The community is in turn dependent on the police to provide services essential to maintaining an atmosphere of stability.
Processes Involved in the Activity

- Public Relations
  - Standardization
    - Public relations activities tend to be standardized
    - Specialized whenever possible
    - Easier to control
    - Facilitates their repetition
    - Prevents wasteful duplication

- Agency Oriented, community Oriented, or Both
  - Include a range of services designed primarily to serve agency needs.
  - Even services to those outside the agency are designed around the benefits that can be gained by the agency.

- Information Flow
  - The information flow is outward in public relations activities.
  - This one-way pattern reflects the belief that if those in the agency’s environment are properly informed about police operations, they will support them.
Hierarchical Level of Involvement
- It is relatively easy to pinpoint management responsibility for agency activities.
- Assignment is generally made in direct relationship to the importance given to a specific program by top administration.

Breadth of Agency Involvement
- Agency involvement in public relations is narrow.
- Public relations is a tool of police management.
- It is an easily compartmentalized function.

Community Relations
- Standardization
  - Are difficult to routinize and standardize.
  - The function they are supposed to perform usually requires flexibility and capacity for rapid change.
Agency Oriented, Community Oriented, or Both
- If the function of the police is to protect and serve, then to be community oriented ultimately serves the needs of the agency, too.
- The aim of community relations is to provide services that are considered important to the public served.

Information Flow
- Two-way information flow is critical to community relations.
- The communication process must publicize the police point of view, stimulate discussion of issues, and solicit feedback from members of the community.

Hierarchical Level of Involvement
- The hierarchical setting of responsibility for community relations activities is so varied that it defines generalization.
- If activities are expected to pervade the entire organization or involve only specific, line-level units, responsibility might be assigned to lower levels.
■ Breadth of Agency Involvement
  - Although certain aspects of community relations may be assigned to specific departmental units, involvement generally crosses divisional boundaries.
  - This requires a distinction between specialized programs and general practices.

■ Citizen Involvement
  - Although the police have either assumed or have been assigned responsibility for dealing with many of our complex social problems
  - They alone can not solve any of them
  - The police are only able to provide limited specialized attention to the most crucial problems, usually in a crisis reactive fashion.

■ Public Relations
  - Citizen involvement is kept to a minimum.
  - Generally passive
  - Citizens are reasons for, but not participants in, the activity.
Community Relations
- Rely heavily upon citizen involvement.
- The citizen is an active participant.
- The police agency does not relinquish responsibility to community relations.
- Ensures that citizen resources are properly accommodated, both to provide assistance in accomplishing police goals and to stimulate feedback on issues and problems.

Public relations activities can and should be part of a properly applied community relations program, but they can’t substitute for it.
- Public relations techniques aim to preserve and enhance a department’s image, not to cope with operating problems.
- The pure public relations approach alienates concerned citizens by convincing them that the department is merely interested in image building, not dealing with problems or in effective communication with the community.

The purpose of public relations is essentially to change perceptions, not to solve substantive operational problems.
- Public relations is a secondary element of police management, and it is compartmentalized.
There are at least five functions that are essentially public relations in trust, but which complement community relations efforts:

- Informing the public about crucial issues
- Developing community support
- Supplementing agency operations and programs
- Presenting an accurate picture of the agency
- Enhancing the agency’s image

Program Examples

- Public relations programs
- Speakers bureau
- Ride-along
- Police station tours
- Safety lectures
- Citizen recognition

Programs with a Major Community Relations Focus

- Rumor control
- Community Advisory Councils/Committees
- Storefront centers
- Neighborhood team policing
- Foot patrol programs
- Physical decentralization of Command
- Problem-Oriented Policing
Crime Prevention: Another Name for Community Relations?

- There is no doubt that crime prevention is a well advertised focus of police function.
- Citizen demand for crime prevention programs continues to grow.
- Most programs are considered as crime prevention, however, at least in practice if not in original purpose, almost entirely informational from the police to the citizen.

Some programs are considered very successful, and their success is defined in a wide variety of ways:

- The number of neighborhood crime watch teams formed
- Number of volunteers in the program
- Measurable decrease in a particular type of crime in a given neighborhood
- The number of brochures distributed
- The number of presentations made
- The number of households following the security advice of police representatives.

The level of crime prevention will be easier to achieve when working with neighborhoods that already have a positive view of the police.

It has been found that police efforts that help minority parents protect their children are more positively received.
Under the umbrella of crime prevention are several programs, which include both elements of public relations and community relations. The ultimate impact of these programs depends on the emphasis placed on the various elements and upon the context in which they are applied.

Neighborhood Watch
- The police ask citizens to report any suspicious activities occurring in the neighborhood.
- The citizen merely becomes an extension of the police patrol apparatus.
- The police officer on the beat and the citizen endeavor to perfect their partnership responsibilities in identifying those problems that can ultimately be corrected by police intervention.

Operation Identification
- Police encourage citizens to mark their possessions with identification recognizable as belonging to them.
- Police Auxiliary Volunteers
  - Many volunteer auxiliary programs involve citizens of all ages in a broad range of support activities.
- Community Crime Watch
  - Public utility companies have been trained and organized as part of a crime watch team.
  - They become an excellent police support group.
- Crime Stoppers
  - These programs join the news media, the community, and the police in a concerted effort to enlist private citizens in the fight against crime.