

Chapter 10

1996 Initiatives to Integrate Technology into Community Oriented Policing – 20 Years Later



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Introduction

The use of technology to improve community policing effectiveness has gained attention over the last decade, primarily due to the rise in the use of social media, however, it is far from new; back in 1996, at a time when the Web was still just a few years old, Google.com did not exist yet and there were only about 100,000 websites (in comparison to over a billion in 2014 (Lafrance 2015)), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) organized a series of five regional conferences that focused on how technology can enhance community policing (NIJ 1996). The conferences were held in Colorado Springs, Colorado; Rochester, New York; San Diego, California; Charleston, South Carolina; and Louisville, Kentucky.

The overarching goal of the conferences was to search for and, eventually, identify ways in which technology could further enhance the relationship between law-enforcement and the community on a win-win basis. The attendees represented a diverse array of law enforcement professionals, including chiefs of various police departments across the country, government officials, consultants, managers, judges etc. and the vast majority of the presentations focused on how to identify meaningful ways to improve community policing through the use of technology. The thematic areas of the conferences included the following topics:

- Using the Internet for community policing purposes,
- How crime analysis technology can help mapping and tracking crime,
- Individual police department technology-facilitated strategies to fight crime,
- Various technology related liability considerations.

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It should also be noted that the conferences were organized 2 years after the establishment of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), as part of the 1994 Crime Act (Roth et al. 1994) through which the Congress was aiming to introduce technologies that would modernize policing. As a result, NIJ was heavily involved in the process and undertook the duty to build a vast and ambitious technology program that would include investments of assets and resources to assist police departments with more equipment, more training, and grants to purchase technology.

The presentations during the five conferences revolved around the use of technology for community policing purposes. A summary of the main points that were presented by both individual speakers and law-enforcement representatives follows below.

Ways in Which Technology Can Improve Community Policing Outreach and Effectiveness

Despite the dramatic increase of use of computers by law-enforcement agencies across the U.S., a 1993 Bureau of Justice Statistics survey revealed that only two-thirds of the Nation's 17,000 police departments were using computers in a consistent way on a daily basis (Northrop et al. 1995). These findings suggested that there is a serious need for police organizations to embrace technology in a more systematic and comprehensive way; COPS programs were aimed at helping law-enforcement agencies to achieve these goals, however, certain obstacles were identified that "impede the development of police technology" (NIJ 1996, p. 10). Those obstacles included the following:

- The fragmentation of police departments across the country that has made them either hard-to-reach markets for technology manufacturers or consumers with limited purchasing power due to lack of resources.
- Concerns over misuse of technology, both by police officers and the public. Those concerns include, but are not limited to, the notion of "big brother" surveillance systems that are employed by police departments to monitor their own officers' activities as well as citizens.

However, despite the above mentioned obstacles, the rapid growth of the Internet provides an array of opportunities for law enforcement agencies to use the Web in order to promote police-community relationships and collaboration. For example, the Internet could be used to inform the community of the latest crime trends or send out electronically, mainly via email, newsletters and other bits of information. Also, citizens could use the Internet to reach out to the local police forces with comments or concerns and get feedback. Also, training officers through the use of websites is another tool that could be used more in the future (NIJ 1996, p. 19). It was suggested that police departments should explore the possibility of creating their own websites.

Technology-Facilitated Community Policing Programs that Are Already Used by Police Departments Across the Country

Some model departments were featured as examples to a successful use of various technologies, among the Dallas Police Department, which introduced a number of tools to foster community policing effectiveness through the use of technology. Those tools included mobile neighbourhood police assistance centers, specially equipped vehicles that increased police mobility and allowed the officers to remain in a neighbourhood around the clock while delivering services to the community in crime-ridden areas. Another innovative tool used by Dallas P.D. was Fax Net, a crime prevention network that promoted the partnership between police and communities by alerting the latter of any criminal activity and wanted suspects in their area.

Another innovative approach from the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department included a state-of-the-art information management system that would allow officers to focus more on solving problems by spending more time with community members in the field rather than wasting time with other tasks. In order to achieve that, the department would implement the following three strategies “to use technology as a force multiplier” (NIJ 1996, p. 30):

- Assigning administrative work and duties to non-sworn personnel in order to give officers more time to engage with the community.
- Eliminate unnecessary work for patrol officers, mainly by using computer workstations and other technology to keep them more time in the field instead of the police station.
- Save money through the use of available technological tools and redirect the savings to solve more community problems.

The importance of tracking and mapping crime was highlighted in the case of the New York City Police Department’s (NYPD) use of the GIS-based crime analysis; in the 1990’s NYPD introduced new mapping and crime analysis program that allowed beat officers to have immediate and up-to-date access to data on crime patterns in their area through workstations connected to a local area network.(Goldsmith et al. 1999). At the time, this was an innovation that allowed precinct commander to become more effective in fighting crime. This effort was funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and was a collaboration between the NYPD and the Center for Urban Research and the Center for Applied Study of the Environment of the City University of New York, a unique partnership between law enforcement and academia in an effort to produce research that will facilitate the implementation of community policing interventions based on crime patterns and spatial analysis.

However, NYPD was not the only Department in the country that had introduced crime mapping technologies; Chicago Police Department developed an innovative crime analysis program, called Information Collection for Automated Mapping (ICAM) which was the first software in the American policing history developed “by police officers for police officers” (NIJ 1996, p. 47). What made this program

unique was its design; it was built in a user-friendly way so that beat officers could use ICAM maps during community meetings in order to present and discuss with members of the community ways to address the crime-related problems of each neighbourhood. (Welch and Fulla 2005).

Other Crime-Detection Technologies

Detection of concealed weapons has been one of the major concern for law-enforcement agencies across the United States; the Departments of Defence and Justice collaborated in an effort to apply pre-existing technology used for military purposed to law enforcement settings. In particular, Rome Laboratories operating under the Defence Research Projects Agency (DAPRA) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) have focused on technologies that can assist police agencies to detect concealed weapons under problematic circumstances where visual detection is not possible, for example under heavy clothing. These technologies include infra-red imaging which detects the presence of a weapon “by showing its cooler image against the warmer body” (NIJ 1996, p. 72), acoustic imaging and X-ray imaging which can be used in controlled environments such as prisons. Although the use of concealed weapons detection technology for law-enforcement purposed was still relatively new, back in 1996, it appeared to be very promising and cost-effective.

Some Concerns Expressed by the Conference Attendees in 1996

One major observation noted was that police agencies need to be careful about the technologies they elect to use and that these innovations are not created in a vacuum. One of the ideas presented suggested that the officers who will be eventually be asked to use the final product, for example, a sophisticated computer system, should participate actively in the design process. If the end-users needs, concerns and remarks are not taken into account during the preliminary stage of the implementation of a technology, chances are that no matter how sophisticated this technology or program is, its implementation will be problematic.

Another issue that was brought up during the conferences was that of constitution-related issues. Given that new technologies are an uncharted territory for law enforcement agencies, police departments should pay particular attention to liability and constitutional issues surrounding new technology and its implementation, including issues of privacy and civil rights protection. An effective approach to this issue could be the creation of working groups where law enforcement agents, prosecutors and academics would consider all the challenges posed by new technologies and come up with effective responses that would eliminate the challenges related to their implementation.

Although most experts in 1996 agreed that technology could boost the effectiveness of community policing, the major recommendation was police agencies should always consider three important rules when implementing community policing programs, namely right timing, possible resistance to the new programs and taking into account the whole picture. Although making a difference in the community is a major goal of any police department, when they introduce a new program or technology, it is important to ensure that any new programs be implemented in collaboration with the community and that sufficient time and effort is invested prior to the program's implementation to secure its proper design.

20 Years Later – Where Are We Now?

Like with many noteworthy initiatives, the degree of success can be measured years later, if not decades and it is our duty, as academics, to assess and evaluate major initiatives that were presented, over the years, as a panacea to improve police-community relations. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to focus on more than a couple of cases in order to highlight the problems, yet, it is sufficient to identify the paradigms of the concerns we need to address in the future.

In 1996 over 20 years ago Chief Sanders, a pioneer of community-based problem solving in the San Diego Police Department (SDPD), called on police agencies to use technology to improve communication with officers in the field and with other agencies, and to open a new communication channel with communities they serve (NIJ report 1996). However, in 2017 it has been reported that the SDPD needs a boost in morale, and new leadership that will inspire young police officers. The department has suffered some blows, including police officers being convicted of misconduct, the department being sued for racism by one of its own and being found to have racial disparities in traffic stops. Furthermore, the San Diego Police Department struggles with the inability to recruit qualified candidates, and it has been stated that the current Chief, Shelley Zimmerman must take personal responsibility for the failures of the SDPD not being able to recruit and retain an adequate number of police officers. She was criticized for lack of actions that goes beyond the ability to help communities solve their problems, to being effective in solving problems within her own department. When Zimmerman switched the blame to accuse the media and others, it thwarts SDPD's ability to identify the real problems (Bowser 2017).

Yet, another department that back in 1996 championed inclusion of technology, in order to improve the quality of police community relations, was the second largest police department in the United States, the Chicago Police Department (CPD). With the advent of the Information Collection for Automated Mapping (ICAM) the CPD hoped that officers who will have access to information they need when and where they need it and whenever appropriate, would share it with the trusted community members to help them identify and solve problems and thus improve police-community relations.

However, in 2017, in perhaps the most damning, sweeping critique ever of the Chicago Police Department, the U.S. Department of Justice concluded that the city's police officers are poorly trained and quick to turn to excessive and even deadly force, most often against blacks and Latino residents, without facing consequences. The 164-page report, the product of more than a year of investigation, painted the picture of a department flawed from top to bottom, although many of the problems it cited have, for decades, been the subject of complaints from citizens, lawsuits by attorneys and investigations by news organizations (Meisner et al. 2017). Thus, despite the high expectations from 1996, once again, the advents in technology have not proved to be sufficient in improving police-community relations. It came as no surprise to one of the authors of this chapter, as she has identified the problems with the CPD already in 2001 (Haberfeld 2002), while analyzing the CPD's CAPS training program that was aimed at improving police-community relations yet, ignored the basic hurdles in obstacles in the implementation of the tenets of Community Oriented Policing. These basic problems are identified in the last part of this chapter and should be considered when one ponders about the pros and cons of various technological innovations and their ultimate impact on police-community relations.

Community Oriented Policing and Technology in 2017– What Do We Need to Consider?

When pondering about the benefits of technology we need to first and foremost address the concept of “universal values”. It is just too often assumed that policing a given community is subject to a set of universal values and all it takes to improve police-community relations is to improve the communication process between these two entities, and when it comes to technology simply provide both parties with more efficient tools to report misconduct and respond to the call for service in a speedy manner. In reality, things are just much more complicated. While many of us would agree that killing a person, in a premeditated manner, or physically abusing a child should constitute some examples of these universal values, the truth is that in many communities, practices of genital mutilation, honour killings or child abandonments are not considered as horrific as many of us might think and, on the contrary, members of these communities would find such behaviours as acceptable and certainly not subject to report to the local law enforcement. We have seen examples of such conduct in the United States and some European countries (Haberfeld 2018).

Haberfeld (2018) identified three interconnected circles that represent the problems inherent in police-community relations, be it from the standpoint of (1) lack of

universal values, (2) lack of trust in officers' integrity or simply (3) lack of clarity on the officers part as to what to enforce and how to use their discretion in a way that does not conflict with the local laws and ordinances but, at the same time, does not alienate various communities that are either active or passive supporters of illegal activities, from children mutilations to terrorist activities.

Finally, what we truly need to consider, while pondering the values of various technological innovations, are the hearts and the minds of the communities and the officers charged with their safety and security. The question of how to buy the minds and hearts of individuals who support various illegal activities, based on their traditions, philosophical views or simple fear, does not have an easy answer. It is however certain that police officers' unquestioned integrity, hiring and training standards must be taken into consideration, before we invest too much time and resources into development of various technological tools that, despite their obvious technical advantages, do not take into consideration the complexity of police work and all the involved stakeholders.

Thus, it only makes sense that the final paragraph of this chapter should restate the concerns of the 1996 conference attendees, first to provide an adequate and properly designed training to officers who will be eventually asked to make use of various technological tools and innovations on a daily basis is of paramount importance and second, building and maintaining sustainable partnerships between different stakeholders is a key to the success of numerous technology-facilitated community policing programs and initiatives. For that purpose, law enforcement agencies should reach out to as many audiences as possible, at the same time as they are considering various new technological advances, to be able to gauge the communities' interests, concerns and overall attitude and readiness for collaboration and cooperation.

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