

The BJA Executive Session on

Police Leadership

2018

The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership is a multi-year endeavor started in 2010 with the goal of developing innovative thinking that would help create police leaders uniquely qualified to meet the challenges of a changing public safety landscape.

In support of an integrated approach to creating safe and viable communities across America, the project directors recruited 20+ principals from a range of disciplines. The principals, in turn, led national field teams of practitioners focused on the work of policing and the organization of the future.

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The principals are supported in their work by a team that includes project co-directors Darrel W. Stephens and Nancy McKeon, and BJA Senior Policy Advisor Steve Edwards.

Managing Reform and Achieving Culture Change in a Major City Police Department

by
Carmen Best

Abstract

This paper details the roadmap to managing collaborative police reform and achieving cultural change in a major city. The U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division has mandated reforms in many major police agencies across the nation. Seattle was initiated into the process in 2011. This paper provides my unique understanding of how to approach reform in a major city police agency and improve the police culture to reflect the mission and goals of a truly reformed agency. I provide an overview of how to immediately prioritize and implement Department of Justice or other agency recommendations focusing on approach, prioritization, and obstacles.

Approach

Many communities across the nation are at a crossroads trying to focus on meaningful and sustainable police reform that will create a culture shift that better integrates the police department into the community it serves. Departments at this crucial juncture need more than a leader who simply checks off boxes of recommendations; they need a respected leader who will inspire a cultural shift that embraces genuine reform and restores the pride of this noble profession. While recommendations need to be addressed, it is critical, first and foremost, to generate a collective impact by advancing community policing strategies as key elements of collaborative reform. It is only with the community's trust and support that departments will realize lasting institutionalized reform.

Collective Impact

It takes a transformational leader to invoke buy-in from others. In order to achieve buy-in, police command staff needs to meet with stakeholders, both within and external to the police organization. These stakeholders include the police unions and as many as possible of the various community/faith based stakeholders. This outreach must be done in collaboration with the Mayor or City Manager (depending upon the form of government) and City Council, whose guidance and input will influence police reform efforts. During stakeholder meetings, the benefits of reform should be highlighted: building trust and collaboration, increasing police support from the community, generating better outcomes from police encounters with community members, and instituting police legitimacy and procedural justice. Research has clearly shown that embracing police reform will improve officer safety, public safety and the ability to solve crime.

Modeling procedural justice by diligently listening to, embracing, and incorporating suggestions into the reform effort is crucial. Initial meetings with stakeholders need to happen early in the reform process and should be completed within 45 days, with the clear expectation and commitment to continuous subsequent communication.

Community Policing

In advancing community policing, one must consider the recent narrative regarding the history of community-police relations and the evaluation of the police department's deadly force encounters and other community contacts with police. The command staff must meet with members of various demographic communities that have felt disenfranchised with police and commit to immediately invigorated community policing efforts. Adopting a strategic community policing steering committee to enhance and expand the role of community policing will ensure that community policing efforts and best practices are realized. The community policing steering committee should be responsible for reinforcing and creating robust demographic community advisory councils within ethnic communities and for promoting the implementation and use of Micro Community Policing Plans ("About MCPP", 2016).

Roadmap to Reform

The first order of business on the roadmap to reform is ensure stakeholders understand and have opportunity to be heard as to the key elements of reform: 1) policies and procedures, 2) training, 3) critical review (accountability), and 4) clear metrics for measuring

success. This proven roadmap to reform, overlaid with the recommendations of the operational areas as assessed by the Department of Justice or other third party evaluation, will lead to reform and subsequent culture change.

- **Policies and Procedures.** Reviewing and revising policy and procedure is the first prong to reform. Police departments must immediately begin the process of revamping and updating policies related to use of force, use of force reporting and review, crisis intervention, de-escalation, stops and detentions, bias, early intervention systems, community policing, accountability, recruitment, hiring and personnel practices when doing so they must incorporate the recommendations as noted by the Department of Justice or other third party entity. All other policies should be reviewed but the aforementioned will be the priority as they are most relevant to the police reform process.
- **Training.** On a parallel track to reforming policies, departments need to establish a clear mission for the Training and Education Division to incorporate recommendations of the Department of Justice. Training must appropriately reflect the policies for which the training is intended. In the spirit of transparency, there needs to be a process for community members to participate in the creation of the curriculum and to participate in non-tactical training (e.g., implicit bias training). The Training and Education Division should establish a training cycle for mandatory and refresher training and ensure there is a protocol for legal advisors and risk management to be in routine contact with the Training and Education staff.
- **Accountability.** Accountability can effectively be measured and managed only after the policies and procedures are in place, training has occurred, and there has been sufficient opportunity for officers to demonstrate that these new policies and training are being carried out in practice. While it is critical that there be processes in place by which citizens can file complaints and allegations of misconduct through a chain of civilian oversight, the department itself must embrace its responsibility to critically review its operations, and hold personnel accountable. This has to be done in order to ensure that the department's commitment to reform remains internally-driven. As is clear from the national dialogue around police reform, the accountability process in many agencies is particularly troubled and in need of additional resources, structure, and transparency.
- **Metrics for Measuring Success.** The fourth key component to cultural change and embracing reform is the ability to closely monitor progress to determine if changes are taking hold and making a difference. For example, preliminary data from Seattle shows that by 2015, the use of force overall had decreased by 55% from the levels reported in the Department of Justice's 2011 findings. Moreover, of the nearly 9,300 incidents to which Seattle officers respond annually involving a subject in behavioral crisis – a particular area of concern for the DOJ – fewer than 2% (1.6%) involved any use of reportable force; of those, the vast majority (approximately 75%) involved no greater than low level, de minimus force (transient pain with handcuffing, for example) (“Fifth Systemic Assessment”, 2016).

As reported in the Seattle Times, findings by the federal monitor overseeing reforms reflected that the public approval rating of the Seattle Police Department had reached an all-time high (Seattle Times, 2016). Officer-initiated action increased even as force encounters decreased. These findings are relevant and important, as it is this type of empirically validated information that confirms policy changes and training are working and achieving cultural change. This information will help inform the public and officers that progress is being made. Instituting clear metrics to measure success should be a top priority.

Technology

Metrics for measuring success will be reliant upon technology and data collection. Creating an information technology steering committee to establish a strategic plan and assess the technology of the department (and of course procuring the budget to support the technology) is needed to: 1) eliminate/minimize paper copies, 2) streamline cumbersome processes, and 3) allow for data collection, aggregation, and analysis.

Priorities, Obstacles and Closing Thoughts

Priorities

Priorities for implementing reform are previously noted. Buy-in, Community Policing, and implementing reforms using the roadmap to reform are all high priorities of equal importance in the reform process. All areas intersect and must run concurrently to achieve successful reform. It is neither feasible nor practical to wait for one area to be completed before moving to the next.

Obstacles

Based on my experience in Seattle, reform will have many challenges and obstacles as there are notable hurdles regarding policy changes and training. Most will be related to staffing and costs, but they are non-negotiable requisites in the reform process. Another challenging area will be ensuring robust accountability structures that have the support that is needed to build community confidence in the police reform process. Lastly, overcoming the technological challenges and securing funding for a comprehensive data analytics platform may present some challenges.

Final thoughts

I am intricately familiar with collaborative reform. Lessons learned from the Seattle Police Department's reform process informed the basis of this report. Seattle is well down the road to reform and the roadmap to reform and culture change is, from my perspective as a 25-year veteran of policing and someone who has been actively involved with police reform from every aspect in my agency, clear. It is one thing to read about police reform or hear about police reform from others; it is quite another task to have actually worked hard in the trenches to make reform happen in a major city police department. It should be understood that reform, as an on-going, iterative process, will always be a work in progress for departments that have truly embraced the meaning of the word – and that is true in Seattle as well - and there will always be obstacles and crises that threaten to derail the

process. There is no question, however, that by following the structured roadmap to reform presented here, agencies can be successful in sustaining reform efforts and cultural change.

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The author is Carmen Best, Seattle Police Department Deputy Chief, Seattle, Washington. As of January 2018 Best is serving as Interim Chief in Seattle.

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