

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 Strong 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 who could focus more resources to complete the task. While the number of demands upon the smaller department and their limited personnel could legitimately justify not even exploring the topic, there was awareness that the department still needed to establish long-term goals and develop a strategy that would ensure success. The excuse of being a small agency did not negate the need to plan for the future. The Durham strategic plan project is comprised of three separate phases, 1) a survey of citizen satisfaction with police services, 2) a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) exercise of all department personnel, a one-day SWOT exercise and planning session attended by police officers and later by community leaders, and 3) Fiscal planning, since as diverse as ideas may be, funding will ultimately determine the level of services that the organization can provide. At the conclusion of the analysis, the agency has an evolving set of goals and corresponding plans to reach them. It also has the renewed support and cooperation of the community it serves.

Benefits of the Strategic Plan:

1. The Durham Police Department decided to treat its constituents as partners and customers; like any good business, it needed to find out what its customers wanted.
2. Community members have questions about police services and how they are delivered; it behooves police chiefs to provide the answers.
3. The responses to the department's SWOT taught the chief much more about his police officers' views than what he could have learned otherwise.
4. Officers report that they are getting more respect and better cooperation from residents since the department launched the strategic plan initiative.

Policing Durham

Though the crime rate in Durham is among the lowest in the state, the town's police department has its hands full. With 20 sworn officers and 5 support staff, the CALEA® accredited police department serves a fluctuating population comprised of full-time citizens and 14,000 students of the University of New Hampshire. The unique policing environment demands a balance between supporting the desires of the permanent residents and allowing responsible flexibility from college

students. In many ways, the community is dominated by the UNH school year. Policing in this environment becomes extremely demanding, commencing at school opening, and lasting until Homecoming Weekend in late October. During this time 3,500 in-coming freshmen come to realize that Mom and Dad aren't around to tell them when to be home nor will they be checking their sobriety when they return. Many of Durham Police Department's clients are strangers to the area, have never been away from home, do not know their classmates, often make bad decisions with strangers, and ultimately abuse a variety of substances. Experimentation with alcohol dominates the social scene. In many ways, the officers are challenged with the dilemma of allowing students the flexibility to gain life experiences, living through those experiences, and simultaneously responding to the concerns and demands of permanent residents.

Durham residents have come to expect a 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. And perception is reality; as law enforcement executives must learn early in their careers. If the department wanted to improve the community's impression of the police, an event needed to be created where the community and the police, together, would determine the direction of the agency. In other words, the department committed to treating its constituents as partners and customers and, like any good business, it needed to 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. Isn't this a component of community policing? In the truest sense of the term, community policing is a philosophy and not just a program. It is a philosophy that calls for police and community cooperation to determine the problems and desires of the community and develop a strategy of partnership that will address those needs.

Community policing also reinvigorates the community's sense of responsibility for maintaining law and order. Law enforcement is ultimately responsible for protecting the public, but good community policing empowers citizens to do their part in sharing the responsibility for the collective community. While it is appropriate that we trust mechanics to fix our cars, we are not excused from our responsibility to check the oil every once and a while! Citizens today routinely question government and 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 these 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.

The Strategic Planning Initiative

Unsure of how to launch a strategic planning initiative, the Durham Police Department began by doing some research. Several excellent resources are found at the Office of Community Oriented Policing at the Department of Justice, www.cops.usdoj.gov, and at the Community Policing Consortium, www.communitypolicing.org, where there are a host of community policing suggestions. Most of the literature on the subject suggested that strategic planning was time consuming, sapped limited human resources, and appeared too much for a small police agency like

Durham to initiate. Nevertheless, the department felt that strategic planning would help to reveal the proper direction that the organization should take.

The department embraced some basic principles of the business world, such as:

- Soliciting and valuing customer comments
- Monitoring performance
- Promoting continuous improvement
- Inviting worker participation

Certain these methods could help the police achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction; the agency launched its strategic planning initiative with a community survey which hopefully would eliminate what the police may *think* the community wanted in police services.

PHASE ONE: Community Survey

Police executives frequently ask themselves and their agencies, how do citizens perceive crime in the community and how does it affect them? How is the agency delivering service and how does the community perceive the department? Community surveys offer a significant opportunity of finding out. Several effective and cost-saving strategies that the department has employed to ease the challenges of development, distribution and analysis of the responses include:

- **Existing Surveys:** The IACP has a number of examples of public safety and internal agency surveys on line at <http://www.theiacp.org/International-and-Community-Surveys>. Durham ultimately arrived at a product that employs fifty questions to gauge customer satisfaction with the police force and concerns about crime and quality-of-life problems. To ensure that the responses will allow for conclusions, it is important that agencies employ mechanisms that are easily measured such as a scale rating of 1 to 5 with 5 meaning very good, yes or no, or true or false, etc. If questions allow for diverse answers, quantifying the responses will be extremely difficult and time consuming.
- **On-line Surveys:** In this information driven age, the vast majority of our citizens have a computer or access to one. There are a host of free or inexpensive instruments that can be utilized to provide citizens with the opportunity to provide feedback to the police. An online search for “free online surveys” will offer a host of tools such as [SurveyMonkey](#). However, police chiefs should be cognizant of the sophistication of the survey instrument and ensure that the survey tool allows for only one submission per IP address. Every agency has their supporters and detractors, and the question that there is potential skewing of the data negates the entire process. Expending even limited funds for a more robust product should be contemplated. Additionally, many instruments have the capacity to provide analyzed responses saving significant time and energy in correlation of the received data.
- **Mailing:** The tried and true method of using the U. S. Mail has many benefits. To conserve 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 from other municipal departments as to upcoming community-wide mailings. To encourage returns, the questionnaire is designed to be folded so that the pre-paid and self-addressed card further simplifies the process. Checking with the Post Office about bulk mailing charges led to a significant savings with subsequent 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, the agency only paid for mailings that provided value to the department.

- **Enlisting Help:** There are untapped resources in every community that are more than willing to assist you in this 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 survey data. Working with an active retirement association or a political science class at the local high school will not only provide an excellent resource but also create a very different and unique opportunity for interaction with community members.

Rate of Return: Durham's initial survey resulted in only 17 percent of the 1,700 surveys being completed and returned for analysis. When the department repeated the survey several years later, there was a concentrated attempt to better inform the community of the arrival of the new survey. The use of the local government's television broadcast and the local media to market the mailings and inform the community of the survey's repeat appearance was designed to increase the rate of return. The television and newspaper pieces emphasized the results of the previous survey, and the programs that had been implemented due to the citizen's opinions gleaned from that survey. It was important for the community to see that their suggestions were implemented into action, and to recognize that this was not just an exercise in public relations, but also a real desire to learn from the returned surveys. As a result of these efforts, the return rate vaulted dramatically to over 47 percent when mail-ins of this type historically have a 25 to 30% return rate.

The community survey asks respondents to rate the department as excellent, good, fair, or poor. Fully 96 percent of respondents rated the department as good or excellent. Other questions included in the survey were: 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 also measured how safe residents felt home alone at night, walking downtown at night, walking through their neighborhood at night, and walking through their neighborhood during the day. They were 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 day and at night.

According to survey results in 2003, Durham citizen's greatest concerns included children's exposure to drugs, home burglary, and the overall safety of children. Topping all other areas in the questionnaire were the concerns relating to the heavy use of the downtown area by pedestrians who saw jaywalking, parking/traffic, and speeding in the downtown area as significant problems.

Ultimately the questions considered for your survey should reflect the issues facing your community. If you have a seasonal population, ensure that their unique concerns are queried. If there is a topical event or project looming, include some reference to these nuances that may impact resident's concerns as they pertain to policing. Don't forget that simply asking the question demonstrates the agency's understanding of the challenges.

PHASE TWO: SWOT Exercise/Internal Survey

During the early variations of the strategic plan some officers expressed concern that "no one is asking us our opinion." The importance of empowering the employees whose hard work would determine the success of the initiative was immediately recognized. Inspired by an internal survey

from a neighboring community, a design was adapted to garner the opinions and perceptions of the Durham staff.

The internal survey is similar to the community initiative except that it focused upon 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. Anonymous submissions encouraged candid responses that offered the police administration greater value. The survey was placed on each of the department's computer desktops allowing the document to be completed and neatly printed. The survey asked officers to consider each of the following agency functions separately: administration, first-line supervision, patrol operations, 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: What would you change about this function if you were the chief of police? 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 any conversations with officers could have been. While there were a number of concrete suggestions and ideas, the exercise also informed the chief of certain misperceptions some of his staff had about administrative issues.

Over the years as the strategic plan was updated and refined to reflect the changing dynamics of the department and the community, an alternative method to garner employee input via the use of a SWOT exercise was implemented. A SWOT analysis is a structured planning method used to evaluate the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats of a project or business venture. However, a SWOT analysis has significant application in the public sector as a tool to identify positive and negative factors within the organization, community, and the broader society that promotes or inhibits successful implementation of change efforts. Additionally, it has the benefit of being adaptable for use with employees as well as with community members. Before developing goals and objectives for a program design or implementing an organizing strategy. The SWOT analysis is a part of the planning for social change process and will not provide a strategic plan if used by itself. After a SWOT analysis is complete, a social change organization can turn the SWOT list into a series of recommendations to consider before developing a strategic plan.

PHASE THREE: Community One-day Planning Session

The third phase of Durham's strategic planning initiative was a one-day planning session with a SWOT designed for the community. This event brought together police officers, community leaders and other 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 educate civilians about the services their department provides, and to offer officers an opportunity to improve their skills as public speakers and community facilitators.

The department wanted to reach the widest possible audience and at the same time limit the group to a reasonable size of about 25 to 30. Invitations were sent to such diverse people as 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 such as the Lions, Rotary Club, and the Knights of Columbus, defense attorneys, business leaders, and media representatives. As

Durham is so immersed with the University of New Hampshire community, student senators and officials from the university were also invited to participate.

Twenty-five participants attended the planning session held in the department’s community room at the police facility. The morning segment featured brief presentations by officers with expertise in drug enforcement, juvenile investigations, the role of school resource officers, training, patrol, and accreditation. Support staff joined the group of presenters and 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 law enforcement agency discussed Durham’s selection process and the Field Training Program and how both processes emphasized the agency’s commitment to the community.

Officers were tasked with presenting a thumbnail sketch of their duties and the challenges they face in carrying out those duties, highlighting the ways they had creatively resolved those issues. Speaking assignments were based on the officer’s willingness to address the group on the subject matter. The chief, acting as emcee, welcomed attendees and introduced each officer, being sure to mention something about each officer’s professional and non-professional lives. The personal touches served to remind everyone that officers are human beings too.

[sidebar] _____ 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*

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

Dep. Chf. Rene Kelley

*12. School Opening and Closing
Red Sox and Patriots Preparations*

Dep. Chf. Rene Kelley

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch

1:00 – 3:00 SWOT Exercise

Chief David Kurz

Among the morning's highlights was a presentation on the nuances of DWI enforcement that included a video of a traffic stop, 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 the "celebratory riots" following sporting events, which involved more than 5,000 college-aged students. There were significant discussions about the police preparations necessary to deal with large disruptive crowds including the importance of mutual-aid assistance from agencies in several surrounding communities.

During the lunch break, the officers offered tours of the police facility allowing the townspeople to see how their tax dollars support a modern law enforcement complex. After lunch, the chief led the attendees into the SWOT exercise with a focus on the future of the department. Citizens shared feedback on police services and offered their views on what should be the goals of the department. While each chief may have a number of issues deemed important such as a structured equipment replacement plan, continuation in the accreditation program, and a commitment to diversification of the workforce, there should be ample opportunity to have free flowing dialogue to ensure that the CEO can hear the opinions and desires of the community.

As a token of its appreciation, the department gave each participant a golf shirt embroidered with the words "Durham Police-Community Partner." The shirts also turned out to be an exceptional public marketing tool. One business owner jokingly stated that he would never wear the shirt again while he was at work. His customers wanted to know more about what the police department was doing than buying items at his store.

The planning session made considerable demands on department resources. Everyone in the agency contributed to make the meeting run smoothly by setting up chairs, arranging for the delivery of lunch, coffee, and many other assorted details. In an endeavor such as this one, the employees who emerge to assume the greatest levels of responsibility will likely evolve as the agency's future leaders. Empowering every employee to take an active role in such an enterprise, as the chief of a small department must do of necessity, allows the chief to observe the capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses of the staff. In addition, each officer experienced some of the many nuances of leadership firsthand that will be beneficial as they evolve as leaders in this or another law enforcement agency.

PHASE FOUR: The Strategic Plan

The model chosen for the plan includes: 1) Long & Short-term Objectives; 2) Performance Indicators; 3) Target Dates for Accomplishing Objectives; and, 4) Strategies to Accomplish the Objectives.

Armed with the findings from the surveys, SWOT, and the planning session, the Durham Police Department set out to draft its strategic plan. The strategic plan is specifically designed to be revisited

on an annual basis. The department describes its objectives in the introduction to the 2014 strategic plan:

The Durham Police Department 2014 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 are 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.

The Durham Strategic plan is comprised of eight long-term objectives. Each one identifies a performance indicator, which is basically the goal trying to be accomplished, target dates for the achievement of a series of short-term goals, which leads to the long-term objective, and finally lists strategies the department will employ toward achieving the objective. The Durham Police Department's eight objectives for the period beginning in fiscal year 2014 and ending in fiscal year 2018 are as follows:

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

The department distributes copies of the strategic plan throughout the Durham community. Each member of the town council receives a copy; one copy is posted for public viewing in the lobby of the Durham Town Hall, and 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.

Strategic Plan Example:

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OBJECTIVE: Increase the quality of service and customer satisfaction

The Durham Police Department defines customer service as any contact, whether passive or active, between an employee of the Durham Police and a customer that causes a negative or positive perception by that customer. The reality of our profession is that the potential of placing employees in negative light exists with each activity performed. After all, police officers are issuing traffic tickets and are often telling persons to do what they do not want to do! However, the concept of

positive customer service must be sustained by being ingrained into the fabric and philosophy of the agency.

Performance Indicator

A community survey was accomplished in cooperation with the UNH Survey Department during 2012 and completed in 2013. This is the fifth survey accomplished by the department. The agency and its' commitment to community oriented policing has been well received by the citizens which was demonstrated by a 96% rating of good or excellent. The enhancement of our partnerships with the Oyster River School District has had many positive attributes including the full-time assignment of a School Resource Officer to the District. We have enhanced the relationship with the University of New Hampshire Police Department and routinely partner to address mutual concerns. We remain very proud that the community continually turns to the agency as an organization that can and does solve complex problems. The agency's recent success in combating the phenomenon of "Celebratory Rioting" at the conclusion of sporting events was truly tested following the New England Patriots exciting win of Super Bowl XLIV in 2015. Such success and the department's commitment to continuous improvement equates to the fact that the agency has earned a higher level of trust within the community. If we as an organization remain focused upon meeting or exceeding all targets, the percentage of customer satisfaction will continue to reflect favorable attitudes toward the agency and its' members.

Targets

2014	Utilize a mechanism that will allow email notifications to Durham citizens about current police events or community alerts
2015	Meet or exceed customer satisfaction levels as indicated by the survey
2016	Develop and submit a new annual survey in cooperation with UNH
2017	Meet or exceed customer satisfaction levels as indicated by the survey
2018	Develop and submit a new annual survey in cooperation with UNH

Strategies

- Solicit input from internal (other Town staff) and external customers
- In cooperation with UNH, refine our survey methods ensuring relevancy and accuracy
- Develop a random sampling method that will also reach those arrested or ticketed
- Continue to utilize public forums as a mechanism that will offer suggestions and ensure the proper direction of agency
- Develop a mechanism that will sample apartments, dormitories and the UNH Campus
- Create an email server that will deliver notices and other information of interest to community members

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

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Once the strategic plan is completed, the CEO must use the document to guide the agency in purchases and other significant matters. For instance, the Chief should articulate at budget hearings

how the strategic plan may have identified radios, or weapons, as being due for a review to determine replacement and funding mechanisms during a specific fiscal year. The plan can also be utilized to anticipate when additional staff may be necessary to keep police response time within acceptable community limits. What is critically important is that this document be utilized to support the departments' initiatives demonstrating to your governing body that as CEO you have set up a timetable for action and a mechanism to get you there!

Building A Better Partnership

Thanks in large part to the strategic plan, along with the spirit of cooperation that marked each stage of the plan's development, the Town of Durham now has a better understanding of the mission, values, goals, and strategies of their police department. Remarks made on subsequent community surveys and during a recent one-day planning session made clear that townspeople are more aware of how the police department functions and what police officers do.

The process to develop and sustain the strategic plan takes time and resources. While there are costs associated with overtime, food and shirts, the plan itself sends the undeniable 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 by meeting those needs. What's more, officers in Durham report that they are receiving a greater level of respect, acknowledgment, and cooperation from residents since the department launched the strategic plan initiative. As managers, we ask our community to invest in us, our investment in seeking their assistance has proven to be well worth the effort.