B. Lack of Collaborative Community Partnerships

NOPD does not adequately encourage or promote meaningful partnership, interaction, and communication with diverse stakeholders, which is critical to learning about and collaboratively addressing problems in the community. The Department’s Operations Manual addresses “Community Relations” in a 3-page policy, outlining the duties and responsibilities of the Department’s Crime Prevention Unit, and of the designated “Crime Prevention Officers” assigned to each of NOPD’s eight districts. The policy states that Crime Prevention Officers will act as liaisons to community groups; assist in formulating community relations policies for the Department; identify training needs; and “relay information and concerns, through the chain of command, from community groups to the proper authority within the department.” The policy further requires each district’s Crime Prevention Officer to hold a monthly New Orleans Neighborhood Police Anti-Crime Council (“NONPACC”) meeting of neighborhood watch groups and other interested citizens.

Until recently, the functions of the “Crime Prevention” position had been the responsibility of Quality of Life officers in each district, but we were told that these officers were frequently pulled from those duties when the platoons were short on manpower. In July 2010, the Department created the position of Community Outreach Coordinator Sergeant, also known as “CoCos,” who have assumed some of the responsibilities described in the Operational Manual, and who appear to have more authority and autonomy than the Quality of Life officers. Although the CoCo sergeants appeared engaged and committed to enhancing community relations, at the time of our review, they described themselves as essentially “self-taught” and in need of specialized training in community- and problem-oriented policing principles.

In November 2010, the CoCo sergeants, along with other supervisors and a number of advocacy organizations, attended CRS’ training in basic law enforcement mediation and racial profiling. Another participant in the training was the Department’s Hispanic Liaison officer, a position the Department created in mid-2009 and that has improved dialogue between the Department and some groups in the community. The officer conducts a weekly radio show in Spanish, makes public presentations, reaches out to Spanish-language media, and also serves as the Department’s primary interpreter while on-duty. Although creation of this position was a positive step, the Latino organizations we spoke with said broader and more extensive engagement and communication is sorely needed.

While CoCo sergeants have begun attending their districts’ NONPACC meetings and neighborhood homeowners’ association meetings, outreach to other sectors of the community,  

---


- 101 -
which have traditionally had less sustained and positive interaction with police, has been far more limited. One CoCo sergeant, for example, described language barriers in engaging heavily immigrant communities. He also noted that the CoCos tend to avoid more volatile neighborhoods out of fear of citizens labeling those contacted as “snitches.” He further observed, more generally, that in “high crime neighborhoods, officers may stay five minutes explaining a crime whereas in the rich part of town they might stay ten minutes. Officers aren’t inclined to listen to someone they believe is a suspect. The culture here forgot that we are required to protect and serve.”

Minority community groups nearly uniformly said that the police rarely reach out to them, for any purpose. One member of a Vietnamese community organization reported that “[a] lot of the young Vietnamese people who get shot in this community, we know who shot them but the New Orleans police don’t do anything. They don’t talk to us. They don’t build community relationships.” We found that some NOPD officers tend not to view members of the public as potential collaborative partners or sources of information and insight about their communities, but rather as potential problems, cultivating an “us vs. them” atmosphere of mutual distrust. Some community members said that such assumptions and perceptions by the police are especially evident in their interactions with young people. One young community organizer told us that, “Officers are on a power trip. NOPD needs to learn how to talk to young people. They get harassed like no other in New Orleans. Whether you’re white, black or Asian, or Latino [young people] get treated like crap. They see us as a walking problem.”

Many within and outside of the Department observed an NOPD “culture” of discourtesy, disrespect, and an unwillingness to listen. This constitutes a significant barrier to successful outreach to the community and to the creation of constructive partnerships. One community leader said that when officers engage with members of the community, they too often do so with an “arrogance, a hostility, a rudeness and vulgarity. It’s not everybody, some people know how to talk to people, but it’s the culture.” The prevalence of discourtesy and disrespect was acknowledged at the highest levels of NOPD, with one member of the Department’s leadership observing: “I don’t know where this thing, this thing that we have to demoralize people in getting our point across ... I don’t know where this disrespect thing came from ... I’m trying to get officers to understand that the public just wants to know why they are being detained, the purpose of the citation, what are my recourses and just show me some professionalism, and some courtesy, and some respect. The public is hungry for this type of interaction.”

He went on to recount being at the scene of a homicide and seeing a woman in her kitchen window, looking out. “I went over to talk to her through the screen, talking about her living conditions and why she’s still living back here, when they’re going to tear this building down. She said, ‘You know, I tried to talk to the officers on the scene about what happened.’ I said, ‘You know what happened?’ She said, ‘Yeah, I did.’ I said, ‘What did the officer tell you?’ She said, ‘he said get the F off this scene. Get behind the yellow tape. So I got behind the yellow tape and went into my apartment.’ So we almost lost that witness who was wanting to help and the officer was being belligerent. That’s what I’m trying to get the officers to understand, that every contact is important, no matter how old, young, rich or poor, that person can be your biggest advocate.”
Our review found that NOPD has a particularly long way to go to repair its reputation, build trust, and create community partnerships with the City’s minority citizens. Indeed, a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that trust in the police, though lacking across the board, differed considerably by race. For white respondents, 59 percent said they trusted the police to do what is right “almost always” (18 percent) or “most of the time” (41 percent). At the same time, only 34 percent of African-American respondents said they could trust the police “almost always” (9 percent) or “most of the time” (25 percent).

Citizens, particularly youth, African Americans, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBT community, spoke of discourtesy, harassment, unwarranted stops, and arrests for minor infractions. They consistently reported that these tactics serve to drive a wedge between the police and the public, antagonizing and alienating members of the community. In the Latino and Vietnamese communities, language barriers and a lack of cultural fluency further impede effective engagement with the police. Encouragingly, however, participants in our community meetings consistently told us that they are ready to work with, and toward, a police department that is inclusive, respectful, and fair in its service delivery and enforcement of the law. Improved relationships with the community will benefit the Department by enhancing people’s willingness to report crime, work with the police in problem-solving efforts, and be the “eyes and ears” for the police.

C. Challenges to Achieving Organizational Transformation

Organizational transformation requires that a police department integrate and embed community- and problem-oriented policing principles into each aspect of its management, structure, and use of resources. To ensure that change is sustained and more than superficial, an agency must review its leadership, policies, climate and culture, systems of accountability, and training and deployment of personnel.

As an initial matter, we observed that outside of the CoCo sergeants, few others within NOPD could articulate the basics of community policing, especially its “problem solving” component. Indeed, officers tended to describe community policing as the domain of the CoCo sergeants, rather than as a shared, Department-wide, responsibility. Apart from the Operations Manual chapter on Community Relations, which lacks substance and primarily describes the responsibilities of “Crime Prevention Officers,” there are no policies to require or guide patrol officers in integrating community policing strategies into their assignments.

We also found that training in community policing principles and techniques—for CoCo sergeants and even more critically for patrol officers—is both qualitatively and quantitatively deficient. Currently, the Department offers just four hours of training on community policing to recruits at the Academy, and no mandatory in-service training to reinforce those skills and concepts. NOPD does not incorporate community policing concepts and strategies into the field training program or the “traditional” academy courses on patrol procedures, investigations, traffic enforcement, and use of force; nor does it offer training in problem solving techniques, such as the “SARA” (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) approach to identifying, assessing, resolving, and evaluating its collaborative efforts to reduce crime. In-service training on verbal de-escalation of conflict, language barrier policing, and cultural sensitivity are