

Round Table # 1 – Victoria

April 25, 2012

We want to thank all of the participants in the Victoria roundtable for taking the time to share their ideas, identify issues and discuss possible solutions to prevent and respond to criminal activity in their communities.

Roundtable Format

A total of 30 people attended the first BC Policing Plan roundtable in Victoria on April 25th, 2012. Participants included local government representatives, victim service and community support organizations and policing agencies. The goal of the roundtable was to capture constructive input from participants towards defining priorities and solutions on policing, crime prevention, and public safety in their community and for the province. To that end, participants were divided into three groups and engaged in six different cafe-style discussions throughout the day, including:

1. Problems with criminal activity
2. Responses to criminal activity
3. Crime prevention
4. Public safety
5. Core policing responsibilities
6. Police and crime prevention resources

For each topic, participants were asked to identify key issues, solutions and priorities.

Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from the group discussions.

Crime Prevention: Identifying and understanding the root causes of crime, and proactively assessing the environment for signs of potential increases in criminal activity is needed. Participants also identified that policing is only one facet of the larger social services picture. Prevention through the support of at-risk groups including youth, those with mental health issues and the transient population is key to the prevention of crime.

Community Driven Policing: Community members are looking to be engaged by police agencies to play a more active role in their communities. In working with police agencies, community members hope to improve the quality of service by actively communicating, sharing information, and identifying the primary challenges faced by their community.

Restorative Justice: Providing more comprehensive rehabilitation and support to both the victims and perpetrators of crime through social programs and education. The focus of the initiative is crime prevention through supporting vulnerable citizens and reducing the likelihood of re-offenses.

Sharing of Resources Across Jurisdictions: Sharing resources across jurisdictions would help backfill/back-up a vacant position and assist with special assignments. Removing organizational silos and creating relationships between jurisdictions would utilize resources more effectively. These resources can then benefit smaller and remote communities in a manner similar to the larger urban centers. This happens to a degree already but it has never been examined within the context of return on investment.

Roles, Responsibilities and Continuity: Clearly communicating the roles and responsibilities of police officers to communities will help develop more effective strategies and priorities that align more readily with the public need. Providing better transition of knowledge and skills when personnel are moved/transferred will ensure continuity of relationships which is critical when there is a high degree of integrated roles in maintaining public safety.

Funding: Need to look at how funding can be more effectively distributed among agencies to have the greatest impact on crime and crime prevention.

Standardization: Developing and releasing new province-wide standards for things such as training that spans across all police – not one for RCMP and another for municipal police departments. Standardization scope must be carefully measured though to provide enough flexibility and not be too prescriptive. Each community has a different set of needs and problems and police need the flexibility to contour their approach as required.

Centralization: In tandem with an examination of standardization for some aspects of policing, centralization of certain services was suggested as a possible means to become more efficient and consistent for everyone involved. Centralizing administration, information management and deployment of certain integrated services was seen as an option worthy of exploration.

Summary by topic

1. Problems with criminal activity

Issues:

- **Drugs and alcohol:** the presence of drugs within communities relates to the amount of crime and the transient population. Drugs affect the community in the type of businesses and people it attracts. This issue is most notable in large urban centers
- **Domestic Violence:** domestic violence seems to be more evident in many communities and providing services along the continuum of care was identified as crucial for effectively addressing domestic violence
- **Targeted crime:** crimes targeting the elderly, crimes in specific communities. Gangs are more sophisticated on how they are infiltrating communities.

- Mental health issues need to be addressed to improve public safety

Priorities and Solutions:

- There is a need for more robust bylaws (such as bylaws that respond to graffiti)
- Early diagnosis of youth at risk is key before they become involved in criminal activity – engage services needed to assist them, including education, community services, social services, and health authorities
- There needs to be a concentrated effort to look into ways of sharing information between police agencies, programs and government
- Shift from suppression to prevention and community collaboration
- Education on the scope of duties to clarify the mandate of police officers
- There needs to be an integrated task force for dealing with bigger issues across the province; this would provide a more focused view and resolution
- Understanding that policing is part of a continuum of social services delivery

2. Responses to criminal activity

Issues:

- Need for better strategies to address drugs and drug trafficking
- Inability to provide community policing
- Insufficient communication with the community about policing issues and priorities
- Lack of consistency of resources and support
- Drug courts are not well resourced

Priorities and Solutions:

- Need to get the communities more involved in discussing issues and developing solutions
- There needs to be a more balanced way to deploy resources based on community needs, issues and existing support systems
- Communities need to set priorities and work with all agencies to focus on priorities
- Ease the burden on the criminal justice system through other social programs and initiatives
- Regional strategies: develop greater borderless attitude by assisting neighbouring communities through sharing of resources and programs, greater integrated planning, removing organizational silos and creating inter-agency relationships where needed
- Mental Health Crisis response team is considered to be an effective program
- Take targeted areas and bring together expertise from various services
- Expand restorative justice programs
- Increase the level of communication between police and the community in the development of strategies and priorities
- Need to look into doing a 10-year plan that rolls continually forward every 5 years regardless of political landscape
- Proactive - preparedness - responsive - follow-up - through the integration of programs, relationship building collaboration, interrelationships amongst agencies

3. Police Core Responsibilities

Issues:

- Police core responsibilities are not defined
- Funds can be used more efficiently if the focus is on quality of life; need more holistic approach and less fragmentation of issues and responses between services
- Social issues (e.g., mental health) are becoming a major cost driver/core responsibility of police
- Need to ensure that legislation governing police and courts is in line with the current needs
- The relationship between police and dealing with mental health issues is under resourced
- Back and forth gaps between police and services of other agencies

Priorities and Solutions:

- Focus more on building relationships
- Pro-active approach to social issues and crime, and being visibly pro-active in the eyes of the public
- Integrated units: seeing better information and better results
- Community driven; community needs to be more engaged
- Federal, provincial, and municipal governments need to determine the level of funding, roles and responsibilities that come from all three levels of government and communities
- There needs to be the development of appropriate metrics that we can all understand, relate to, and measure effectively

4. Crime Prevention

Issues:

- Difficult to find volunteers who can be security cleared in rural settings
- Lack of governance
- Lack of continuity when officers being transferred and moved around
- Crime prevention is the responsibility of the community - not just the police

Priorities and Solutions:

- Ensuring community programs are marketed correctly for optimal effectiveness
- Removing organizational silos and creating engaging relationships
- Need more programs that target at-risk youth such as mentoring, drugs and alcohol (which is not classified as crime prevention)
- Need to identify and address the root causes of crime: education, poverty, housing, mental health issues, addictions, child abuse, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

- School and communities are doing proactive activities and programs on crime prevention - There needs to be more focus on these programs through communication and funding commitment

5. Public Safety

Issues:

- Media offer a perception of criminal behaviour that is often inaccurate and sensationalized.
- The challenge is to address reality while also recognizing the need to address the public's perception of how safe they feel.
- Limited governance link between Mayor and council, the public, and police agency
- The public is not reporting crime because they feel that crime is not being responded to
- Program stoppage due to lack of resources

Solutions and priorities:

- Need for more programs at the community/ground level: provide more eyes and ears for law enforcement
- Identifying early warning signs (cues for the development of a potential crime problem)
- Success depends on the engagement of the community and citizen engagement
- Need to create a greater sense of community
- Improve communication surrounding policing - incorporate the positive and more proactive messages rather than only focusing on negative comments
- Balancing between immediate need and long term sustainability and success
- Provide ways and means (such as bus passes) for individuals (including youth) to keep busy at night
- Develop programs, vehicles, and channels to increase police visibility
- Help new members of communities integrate
- Volunteer appreciation: recognize volunteers

6. Policing and crime prevention resources

Issues:

- Disconnect between politicians and policy makers
- Need to examine funding model
- Better funding is needed at the provincial level
- Crime prevention is not adequately resourced
- Difficultly filling vacancies in a timely manner
- Better resourcing of social agencies/social issues could result in more police resources available for "core" policing functions
- When funding tightens, the behaviour of tightening resources starts to occur; we need to work towards being smarter and more efficient on how we deploy our services

- When social service programs get cut at the federal/provincial level (e.g., mental health), it affects local policing. Local governments cannot influence funding decisions of other levels of government but they can control local policing resources. Police end up taking on responsibilities they are not either well equipped on or trained in
- Roles and responsibilities are not consistent across the province - we need to go back to the scope and legislative mandate of agencies

Priorities and Solutions:

- Consider police funding in relation to the total scope of funding opportunities available and as a partner with other linked agencies and professions. Federal, provincial, municipal and other communities need to determine the level of funding, roles and responsibilities that come from across all three levels of government and communities
- Appropriately placed/trained volunteers
- Centralization and integration of administrative functions
- Having good oversight in place to develop learning organizations towards being capable of responding to change
- Look into finding a balance to recruit, attract resources to elevate the succession planning so we are proactively dealing with the bigger issues.
- Align resources with strategic priorities/analysis of needs
- Recognizing the region: develop more of a borderless attitude by assisting your neighbouring communities through sharing of resources and programs. Looking towards more integrated planning Removing organizational silos and creating inter-agency relationships where needed.
- Invest into the police auxiliary support and determine how community involvement can help