

21st Century Policing – Pillar 1: Building Trust and Legitimacy

Editor’s Note: This article, the second in a series written for the VLCT News, summarizes a portion of [The Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing](#), published in May 2015. The first article in this series was printed in the February 2016 VLCT News. VLCT PACIF is using various means to encourage its member police departments to embrace and implement the principles discussed in the Final Report, which this series is intended to help non-police readers to understand. Most of the text below is taken directly or paraphrased from the part of the Final Report that explains Pillar 1.

Building trust and nurturing legitimacy on both sides of the police-citizen divide are necessary for maintaining a healthy democratic society. People are more likely to obey the law when they believe that those who are enforcing it have legitimate authority and are acting in procedurally just ways. Research demonstrates that adhering to the principles of procedurally just behavior leads to relationships in which the community trusts that officers are honest, unbiased, benevolent, and lawful. The community therefore feels more inclined to comply with the law and the dictates of legal authorities — and is more willing to cooperate with and engage those authorities because it believes that they all share a common set of interests and values.

The principles of procedurally just behavior also apply within law enforcement organizations to agency practices and to relationships among officers and with leaders. Research shows that officers who feel respected by their supervisors and peers are more likely to accept departmental policies, understand decisions, and comply with them voluntarily, and it follows that they are more likely to bring this respect into their interactions with the people they serve.

It is important to understand that a key component of external procedural justice – the practice of fair and impartial policing – is built on understanding and acknowledging human biases, both explicit and implicit. Bias has harmful effects, even if the biased person (officer or not) is unaware of his or her biases. To achieve legitimacy, mitigating implicit bias should be a part of training at all levels of a law enforcement organization. Rather than focusing on lines of authority that seem to separate police from the people they serve, officers need to recognize their implicit biases. This will help them more effectively listen to and respect the community’s needs and wishes.

The Six Pillars of 21st Century Policing			
1	Building Trust and Legitimacy	4	Community Policing and Crime Reduction
2	Policy and Oversight	5	Training and Education
3	Technology and Social Media	6	Officer Wellness and Safety

Ione Minot
RMS Marketing Specialist