

21st Century Policing: Pillars 2, 3, and 4

*Editor's Note: This is the third article in a series of four explaining **The Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing**, the full (116-page) version of which is posted [here](#). VLCT PACIF is using various means to encourage its member police departments to embrace and implement the principles put forth in this report. In previous issues, we introduced the concept of 21st Century Policing and wrote about the first of the "Six Pillars" with which the Task Force summarizes its findings. This month, we reprint explanations of Pillars 2, 3, and 4 from City Officials Guide to Policing in the 21st Century, a new publication of the National League of Cities (NLC) written specifically to help city officials understand how they can most effectively support their police departments in implementing the recommendations listed in the Final Report. The NLC guide addresses cities across the country, yet many of its messages have value for smaller-scale Vermont communities. Readers will find the link to download the PDF file of this 20-page guide [on the NLC website](#).*

Pillar Two: Policy and Oversight. Pillar Two emphasizes that established law enforcement agency policies must reflect the values of the community they are serving.

Depending on the size of a municipality, its different neighborhoods may have very different value systems when it comes to interacting with law enforcement. To establish effective policies that serve all residents, local leaders need to work with law enforcement executives to develop a process of collaboration with community members, especially in communities and neighborhoods disproportionately affected by crime. In collaborating with community members, and improving these relationships, law enforcement agencies should also work to develop policies and strategies for deploying resources that aim to reduce crime, increase community engagement, and foster cooperation. Municipal leaders also need to work with law enforcement executives to ensure that all appropriate policies and aggregate data are public and transparent.

Municipal officials must also be aware of local law enforcement agency policies on the use of force. They must work with law enforcement executives to ensure that officers are well-trained on methods of de-escalating incidents before they get out of hand and leave officers with no choice but to use force to protect both the public and themselves. Municipal leaders also need to fully understand how their law enforcement officers deal with mass demonstrations, paying special attention to the appropriate use of equipment acquired from the military such as fully automatic weapons, sniper rifles, tear gas, and armored personnel carriers.

Municipal leaders should ensure that their law enforcement agency policies and procedures are well-maintained, well-researched, and up-to-date by periodically reviewing them and conducting non-punitive peer reviews of critical incidents separate from criminal and administrative investigations. To perform these functions, many cities have established civilian oversight mechanisms within their communities. The decision to establish a civilian oversight board rests solely with elected or appointed officials.

To help municipalities develop effective law enforcement policy and oversight, the U.S. Department of Justice, through its Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and Office of Justice Programs (OJP), can provide assistance to jurisdictions. Municipal leaders should work with their law enforcement agencies to determine what programs might be available to assist agencies in developing appropriate policies for serving the community. [Editor's note: at the VLCT Online Law Enforcement Training Center, PACIF member police departments can download a variety of model policies developed especially for use in Vermont.]

Pillar Three: Technology and Social Media. The use of technology can improve policing practices and build community trust and legitimacy, but its implementation must be built on a defined policy framework with clearly delineated purposes and goals. One example of the effective use of technology is requiring law enforcement officers to have on body-worn cameras (BWCs) as they interact with the public. A recent 12-month study examining the use of BWCs by law enforcement found that officers wearing the cameras had 87.5 percent fewer incidents of use of force – and 59 percent fewer complaints – than officers not wearing the cameras. [Source: Ariel Barak, William A. Farrar, and Alex Sutherland, “The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens’ Complaints Against the Police: A Randomized Controlled Trial,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 2014.]

Municipal leaders should fully understand the additional steps that need to be taken when requiring officers to use BWCs. These include:

- storing the data from the BWCs;
- securing and restricting access to the data;
- adhering to privacy rights;
- properly redacting the data to comply with freedom of information requests by the public and news sources;
- complying with state evidentiary and data retention requirements; and
- training officers on the use of the equipment.

While the effective use of technology and social media can enhance community policing initiatives, there are often limits – and sometimes serious consequences – to using technology that could likewise put a municipality and its law enforcement agency at risk. Municipal leaders need to fully understand both the positive and negative implications of using such technology before they authorize its use in order to foster transparency.

Pillar Four: Community Policing and Crime Reduction. Pillar Four focuses on the importance of community policing as a guiding philosophy for all stakeholders. Municipal leaders need to work closely with law enforcement agencies to reach out to community residents. Doing so can help to identify problems, foster a culture of collaboration, and implement solutions that produce meaningful results for the community. Municipal officials need to ensure their law enforcement agencies develop and adopt policies and strategies that reinforce the importance of community engagement in managing public safety.

Community engagement needs to focus on multidisciplinary, community-oriented team approaches for planning, implementing, and responding to crisis situations with complex causal factors. Law enforcement agencies should engage with other agencies to develop a multifaceted approach to community governance. Communities should support a culture and practice of policing that reflects the values of protection and the promotion of the dignity of all community members – especially the most vulnerable, such as children and at-risk youth.

Excerpted from *The NLC City Officials Guide to Policing in the 21st Century*
by Yucel Ors and Nicole DuPuis

THE SIX PILLARS

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| 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 |