

Module 7:
Neglected Territory



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Law Enforcement's communication with the public has been severely challenged with the Covid-19 Pandemic, as well as its engagement efforts with its community after this years Civil Unrest. The Los Angeles Police Department has been scrambling to affectively communicate with its community ever since the state and city has been intermittently faced lockdowns throughout the year due to this historic pandemic.

The LAPD has made it a priority for strong and affective engagement and communication with its community since the late 1960's. "The LAPD formalized its community outreach program in the aftermath of the Watts Riots by establishing a Community Relations Section. The Department recognized the need for mutual understanding and communication between the LAPD and the public, especially with minority communities in the aftermath of the Watts Riots. This program's initial goals were unification of the Department's efforts to consolidate and broaden community support and to assist local station commanding officers in maintaining channels of communication with minorities throughout the City. It was felt that, by engaging minority communities in meaningful dialogue, police-community problems, which contributed to social unrest or major confrontations, could be avoided" (LAPD, 2020).

This bridge of communication was further tested with the Los Angeles Riots in 1992 due to the infamous Rodney King Incident and use of force by the LAPD. These neighborhoods where drugs and daily gang shooting flourished became a war zone of enforcement from the LAPD. At the conclusion of the destructive riots, changes to engagement and communication were made. "The federal agreement mandated that the LAPD hold quarterly meetings in the neighborhoods they served. They were ordered to get to know the issues of concern from street to street, the dynamics of

families and the languages spoken in the areas they patrolled” (Denkman, 2020). The era of the Warrior mentality of crime suppression versus the Guardian model of community policing and engagement, spawned its seed in the city of angels.

Essentially, the LAPD was ordered to engage in constructive communication with the communities it served. Commander Emade Tingirides explained this new method of engagement. “It was a partnership...rather than law enforcement telling the community what we're going to do for them, the community told us their expectations and told us what they wanted us to do for them” (Denkman, 2020). The method of communicating with this community was to remove the barriers to interaction.

The IMPACT Model of Policing provides that, “All human beings share a number of basic needs. We can increase our chances off promoting positive behavior and gaining voluntary cooperation by recognizing, acknowledging, and fulfilling these needs” (Fitch, p.57). The community at need was provided a “buy-in” by the LAPD. “One way to ensure a proper outcome is to give the other party a stake the process” (Fitch, p.58). The community was facing high number of shootings, violent crimes, and high number of children falling out of the school system. Increased communication and quality partnerships were needed to ensure success for this community. Tingirides explained the collaborative process between the LAPD and the inflicted community blossomed. ”What's most compelling about it is there's now a relationship so when there is conflict, we can sit down and have these conversations because we have this trust” (Denkman, 2020).

LAPD officers were physically present in the communities providing a neighboring and supportive role rather than one of an enforcer. The trust that the

uniform and badge represented began to shine brightly as the collaboration and communication was strengthened. “We are most likely to listen to messages from people we admire or respect than from other individuals we dislike or disrespect. The more others like and trust us, the more apt they are to listen to, and to be influenced by, our messages” (Fitch, p.68). The communicative efforts of the LAPD to engage with a portion of the community that has had a long history of distrust and animosity has improved substantially. ““(LAPD’s) reputation has changed dramatically,’ said Christine Cole, executive director of the non-profit Crime and Justice Institute, who co-authored a 2009 Harvard Kennedy School study on change within the LAPD since the riots. ‘They seem to be doing things excellently as it relates to constitutional policing and transparency’” (Wells, 2017).

Events such as Operations Shoes from Santa, where children from disadvantaged neighborhoods receive a new pair of shoes and toys have been modified. Other events such as Coffee with a Cop, and Taco with a Cop, were great rapport building events, as the officers were able communicate directly with their neighbors and humanize themselves and the work they do in their communities. These events presented a traditional communication pathway for engagement.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has created a devastating void in person to person communication between the LAPD and its community. This has resulted in cancellation of these traditional lines of communication. The days of crowded Town-hall meetings, school safety meetings, business district groups, parks, libraries, and monthly community based meetings have been forced to quarantine. This integral communicative nature of engagement, which is the oxygen for preserving the

tranquility of the community, has resulted in disconnect, confusion, and a feeling of distance from our neighborhood stations. As people see the “closed” sign on the front doors of their respective police stations, the distancing effect and loss of attachment multiplies within the community.

“Across the U.S., various community-oriented policing and outreach initiatives have been cancelled or modified due to the close proximity between officers and members of the public (NPF, 2020). Due to social distancing guidelines, officers are being required to spend more time in their patrol cars and interact with community members less (Hermann, Morse, & Jackman 2020)” (Jennings & Perez, 2020).

Much like many states around the nation, Los Angeles felt the decrease in criminal activity at the early onset of the shut-down. “Crime rates have dropped significantly since people started staying indoors, and minimizing the need for foot patrols” (Bates, 2020). The reduction and temporary termination of foot and bicycle patrols have effected the daily communication with the patrol officers and the people in the community.

The LAPD began to reach out to its community through its social media platforms via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Nextdoor in order to provide the direct communication and engagement it was missing. The civil unrest resulting from the George Floyd issue made it more crucial that we were communicating and providing the message of support and transparency to our community. Captain Denton Carlson, of the San Ramon Police Department, explained that, “Social media is one of the best ways to really get messaging out there and get information from the public” (USD, Presentation 6.2, 2020). The ability to present timely photos and provide a narrative

regarding the concerns of the community were crucial during the pandemic and civil unrest. People were quarantined at their homes and unsure of what to expect. The LAPD ensured proper communication with the most up to date information for Covid testing locations and social distancing protocols. This allowed the public to maintain their direct line of communication with its neighborhood stations.

“The most obvious changes are that most of us now have less face-to-face, in-person interaction with others, and when we are face to face, we are wearing masks... We have less interaction overall with people outside of the people we live with, and we spend more time on Zoom, Skype and other mediated platforms” (Taunton, 2020). Zoom and other Visual meetings were installed in our repertoire. We actually handled our yearly National Night Out Event under Zoom and had just under 90 online participants, including performances from various groups and singers, providing our community with an opportunity to celebrate community empowerment. We also completed Faith and Blue function, a collaboration of the community, religious leaders, and the police in a virtual setting. This opportunity was provided to discuss the recent unrest and issues with Black Lives Matter, policing, and the future of engagement in our diverse communities.

The task of effective and productive engagement and communication between the police and the community they serve has been severely challenged with the Covid-19 pandemic. The civil unrest and anti-police movement have only contributed with additional stress and uncertainty, due to the lack of traditional communication methods. LAPD’s use of Social media and virtual meetings have become the new tools that are being fully utilized in an uncertain and unprecedentedly difficult year.

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