

Metropolitan Police Department – District of Columbia
2001 TOP Application

PROJECT PURPOSE

Statement of the Problem

Research shows that one of the challenges most police departments face in developing and implementing community policing strategies is forming and maintaining partnerships with the community. The challenge of partnership building is real among all classes of people. In upper-class neighborhoods, citizens feel no need for such partnerships because of the low crime rate while in lower class neighborhoods, citizens are either too busy trying to make ends meet or are distrustful of the police due to past experiences. In most neighborhoods, it is often very difficult to get citizens to attend meetings as part of partnership building.

In early 1997, the Metropolitan Police of the District of Columbia (MPDC) began to incrementally implement community policing with the goal of preventing crime and fear of crime. This requires working with citizens and others to help build safe and healthy neighborhoods throughout the District of Columbia. When Chief Charles Ramsey took over the leadership of the police department in April 1998, he set an ambitious goal of making the Nation's Capitol the safest city in America.

To accomplish this goal, the department adopted *Policing for Prevention* as the new strategy of community policing for the city. This strategy is founded on the basic building blocks of community policing -- partnerships, problem solving and information sharing. *Policing for Prevention* is designed to include a larger collection of resources to target a broader range of problems. It helps to stabilize communities through neighborhood-based problem solving, and it promotes long-term prevention by addressing the underlying causes and conditions that often lead to crime.

The *Policing for Prevention* strategy has three main parts: 1) Focused Law Enforcement, requires the police to respond to calls for service and enforce the law; 2) Neighborhood Problem Solving, requires the police and other enforcement agencies such as Department of Public Works (DPW) and Department of Consumer Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) to work with citizens and other non-enforcement city agencies to identify and address crime and disorder problems; and 3) Systemic Prevention, addresses the underlying causes and conditions that contribute to crime and disorder. While the police primarily handle the enforcement part, the other two components require a strong collaborative relationship and information sharing between the police, citizens, businesses, and other city agencies.

The District of Columbia is divided up into 83 Police Service Areas (PSA's). The Metropolitan Police Department has assigned at least one Lieutenant, two Sergeants and 18 – 24 police officers to each PSA. Each PSA is unique in terms of demographics and crime and disorder problems. Under the *Policing for Prevention* strategy, each PSA works with city agencies, citizens, and other community stakeholders to identify crime and disorder problems and to develop collaborative strategies for addressing them. For this to be successful, the citizens must be directly involved in designing the strategies and carrying them out.

The District of Columbia has one of the most diverse populations in the nation. Based on 1998 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 34 percent of the 523,124 residents is white, 62.3 percent is black, 3.0 percent is Asian or Pacific Islander, 7.2 percent is Hispanic, and less than 1 percent is American Indian. Nearly 23 percent of the residents live below the poverty level. Getting these diverse communities to work in partnership with the police and with one another presents a challenge for the *Policing for Prevention* strategy.

Adding to the challenge is the limited access to technology for many individuals and organizations in our community. In a recent presentation, Steve Case of American On Line stated that 75 percent of households with incomes over \$75,000 own computers, while only ten percent of our poorest families do. According to Mr. Case, the Internet is becoming as central to everyday life as the telephone and the television. Still, only 53 percent of U.S. households own a PC, and only 37 percent have online access.

The problem facing MPD is one of building, sustaining and informing the partnerships necessary to address crime and disorder problems in the PSA's. This requires that partners are in every contact and can interact on a routine basis.

Proposed Solution

One of the tools that is critical in developing and maintaining good partnerships is effective communication. In furtherance of neighborhood problem solving and systemic prevention components of *Policing for Prevention*, MPDC proposes to enhance communication between the police, citizens and other city agencies and businesses through the proposed *PSA Online Project*. *PSA Online* seeks to establish a strong communication network that allows police, citizens, and other agencies to maintain virtual contact with each other.

MPDC plan to use the funding from this program to purchase and equip each of the 83 PSAs with the New Internet Computer, the NIC for two community-based organizations and/or active citizens. The NIC is designed to support popular plug-ins like Real Player, Java and Macromedia Flash Player, so it's just as Internet-capable. It is easy to use and the representatives in each PSA can readily access the MDPC and other City Web sites. The individuals and organizations will use the Nick's to access information about their neighborhoods, to share information with others in the community, as well as to provide crime and disorder information to the PSA Lieutenant.

The participants in the *PSA Online* project will serve as facilitators of the PSA. They will be tasked with specific responsibilities, including assisting with recruiting citizens for community meetings, outreach programs, problem identification, problem solving, and other activities that enable the citizens to participate more fully in the community policing strategy. We envision this as a way of "putting the community into community policing". *PSA Online* will allow the sharing of MPDC's PSA plans with partners as well as sharing other critical information between the community and the police.

¹ Case, Steve, Chairman and CEO America Online, Inc.; Address to National School Boards Association's 13th Annual Technology and Learning Conference, Dallas, Texas, November 11, 1999

Project Outcomes

MPDC envisions that the *PSA Online* project will influence the *Policing for Prevention* strategy in a number of significant ways. First and foremost, it will improve communication and information sharing among citizens and the police at the PSA levels as well as with other city agencies. This, in turn, will help strengthen the partnership for problem solving in each of the PSAs. Second, the improved communication through *PSA Online* will lead to an increased closure rate for crimes committed in the city. The timely information provided by citizens will be invaluable to the police in their investigations. A third, and final, outcome of *PSA Online* is a reduction in crime and disorder problems in the city.

INNOVATION

As the Metropolitan Police Department implements its Policing for Prevention strategy, it is focusing on strengthening its link to community organizations and activists. Within MPDC, the 83 PSAs are relatively small geographic areas where problem solving takes place. The PSAs function as the organizational unit with the closest interaction with the community. Innovative communications strategies and programs will play a pivotal role in encouraging community participation and enhance problem-solving partnerships.

This project presents an innovative method of using technological tools to support neighborhood problem-solving efforts. It combines community access to Internet-based services with the functionality of obtaining essential police and citywide information on line and to provide information to the police and other city agencies. This approach will also provide information from the community to the police and other city agencies. *PSA Online* is an innovative approach to using the Internet to promote public safety and to meet the challenges associated with the “Digital Divide”.

Connecting the PSA’s directly to community groups and residents through the Internet provides the PSA Lieutenants the opportunity to establish a two-way, multifunctional communication link through the PSAs’ web pages. MPDC will transmit notifications of crime trends in the community as well as notices for PSA and Problem Solving meetings. Residents will also have access to PSA problem-solving action plans as a part of the Partnerships for Problem Solving Initiatives. Internet access will provide residents an opportunity to participate in virtual town meetings, to post and comment on identified problems and proposed solutions in their own neighborhoods.

By involving community organizations and individual activists through *PSA Online*, MPDC is essentially decentralizing police-community interaction, planning and community problem solving. Brainstorming solutions online with residents, allowing residents to track Departmental progress, getting feedback on non-emergency service requests, and obtaining timely emergency information are the exciting approaches that *PSA Online* will bring to the citizens of the District of Columbia.

DIFFUSION POTENTIAL

In developing *PSA Online*, MPDC reviewed several other police department websites to build on the experiences of other police technology initiatives. Our review of Internet web sites for the New York and Los Angeles Police Departments show the use of community-based information by neighborhood in geographical areas similar to the District's PSA structure. See Appendix A for samples of the use of current use of Internet technology by policing agencies.

The advantage of *PSA Online* over the common use of such sites involves the interactive exchange of information that improves upon the one-way "bulletin board" announcements that are commonly used to convey information to communities. *PSA Online* will serve as a model for policing agencies that are interested in making their sites serve as a resource for increased community involvement, as well as a source of information. *PSA Online* will provide an example of how these law enforcement agencies can move forward toward active exchange of ideas and information. To that end, MPDC will carefully document the development and implementation process to build a "lessons learned" document.

Some of the methods MPDC will utilize to disseminate the lessons learned from *PSA Online* will include the following:

- Presentations at the International Association of Chief's of Police (IACP) Conferences
- Presentations at the Annual Problem Solving Conference
- Presentations at National Organization of Black Law Enforcement (NOBLE)
- Articles in newsletters and magazines such as Association for Police Communications Officers
- Reports to public sector Web sites such as Civic.com and the National Association of Public Administrators

PROJECT FEASIBILITY

Technical Approach

PSA Online represents a model for enhancing community crime-solving efforts that could be utilized by police organizations across the nation. The Metropolitan Police Department is proposing to link its Patrol Service Area (PSA) units to community activists and organizations through the Internet. By utilizing existing organizational links between the PSA and the community and enhancing the communication, this proposal presents a cost effective and unique method of improving the quality of life for many of our citizens currently disenfranchised by the "Digital Divide."

Within MPDC's organizational structure, the PSA is located at the neighborhood level. At present, hundreds of community organizations and individual activists, ranging from

religious leaders to children and family advocates and local elected officials, work with PSA officers through the Partnership for Problem Solving training provided by MPDC. These organizations and individuals work together with the police to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood. While some of the organizations have Internet access, many do not.

The mutual interests of community organizations and the PSAs -- combined with the current explosion of Internet technology -- presents MPDC with a unique opportunity to improve the flow of information to the community while advancing our efforts to prevent and combat crime. There is much talk these days about the Digital Divide, yet few actual solutions. The TOP grant provides a basis to narrow that gap in a way that can be easily replicated in communities across the nation.

The Parks and Recreation Department is establishing 26 Computer Learning Centers throughout the city. These recreation centers attract large number of community people -- especially youth and seniors -- who play a key role in promoting problem and crime solving efforts. MPDC plans therefore, to provide two Nick's to each of the centers and make *PSA Online* available to residents in those communities.

Linking the PSA's and the community groups via the web will require modifications to the MPDC Home Page. Specifically, MPDC will add a *PSA Online* link from its home page that will connect each organization or individual to its respective PSA. In addition, MPDC will develop PSA Web pages and content in Microsoft Front Page for each of the PSAs. Front page will allow for easy page development and content maintenance by PSA staff.

In addition, the MPDC will provide the Nick's to two organizations and/or individuals within each PSA. The selection of organization or individuals will be based on well-defined criteria to be developed by MPDC in consultations with members of District Advisory Committees and other community leaders. The Nick's will include state-of-the-art equipment: Pentium III Processor at 600 MHz, 15-inch monitor and 56K modem. Internet connection will also be provided by MPDC. The Nick's will be configured to start-up on the MPDC Home Page, and then, the user will link to PSA page.

Users will utilize both the MPDC Home Page and the Web pages developed for each PSA. The community-based users will communicate with the PSA either directly through the Web site chat room or through e-mail. Brainstorming sessions can then be held online to solve problems and to report nuisance type activities as well as major crime intelligence data. Appendix B provides an overview of the proposed technical architecture. In addition, Appendix C illustrates the MPDC organizational structure.

From the PSA home page, the user can also link to the District government home page to request various services such as trash pick-up, driver license information, and other city services. *PSA Online* will, thereby, contribute to a community-based government environment.

By using the Internet to provide connectivity, the communication infrastructure is “infinitely” scalable and fully interoperable. MPDC will require that users follow established procedures for loading new applications that could affect interoperability and scalability. The basic design allows the future *PSA Online* to be expanded to many new users on an annual basis, contingent on budget constraints and availability of private funds. MPDC will develop Standard Operating Procedures for the project.

MPDC will maintain the purchased Nick’s through vendor maintenance agreements and through its internal help line. Web page content management will be overseen through the District Commanders, the Office of Organizational Development, and the Office of Corporate Communications. Updating the content will be the responsibility of the PSA Lieutenant, who commands MPDC resources within the PSA and heads the local PSA Committees. The Recreation and Parks Department will be responsible to MPDC for maintaining and securing the Nick’s on their property.

Over the past year and a half, MPDC has made significant advances in developing its information technology infrastructure. Specifically, the department installed almost 1,500 new desktop computers, enhanced its network, launched several new applications, and has installed mobile data computers in patrol cars. Moreover, the Department established a new Help Desk for computing and network-related troubleshooting. In addition, MPDC has invested in new management, recently hiring a new team with a successful track record to provide ongoing supervision and improvement to the information technology infrastructure. (Refer to Appendix E for Project Team Identification.) These experiences make MPDC uniquely qualified to develop, implement, and maintain the proposed system for *PSA Online*.

The Metropolitan Police Department will implement this project over a 24-month period. The major components of the project include the following:

- All Nick’s will be purchased and equipped with the necessary programs within five months of the TOP Grant award.
- MPDC will modify its Home Page within two months of the TOP Grant award
- PSA Web Pages will be designed and initial content will be developed and launched within six months of the TOP Grant award.
- Web page training for PSA Lieutenants will be completed within seven months of the award
- All Nick’s and telephone lines will be installed within seven months of the award
- Training and testing will be finalized by end of seven months of the award
- Final Project kick-off will be held within eight months of the award
- Evaluation will occur throughout the 24-month project period

The basis for sustaining *PSA Online* is MPDC’s and the District government’s commitment to the community-policing initiative. As this initiative develops over time, *PSA Online* will be enhanced and improved to include greater numbers of people and individuals directly communicating with their local PSA unit over the Internet.

MPDC has made a significant commitment to community policing. The Department has aligned its organization to facilitate implementation of this approach, by providing training to officers, and committing funding and management support to enhancing the information technology infrastructure and computer applications needed to support this effort. *PSA Online* is the next critical component of this effort to “bring the community into community policing.” Based on its internal technology and management capabilities, MPDC clearly has the ability to develop, implement, maintain and sustain *PSA Online*.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/REDUCING DISPARITIES

During the past year and a half, MPDC has been working very closely with community-based organizations in their Partnerships for Problem Solving training. As of now, approximately 1400 community residents representing local organizations have participated in the training conducted in 55 of the 83 PSAs. These organizations include Civic Associations, Non-Profit Organizations, Public Housing Resident Councils, Senior Citizen Groups, etc. (A sample of the community-based organizations is listed in Appendix E.) The demand for the services proposed by the *PSA Online* project is evidenced by the letters of support in Appendix J.

The proposed *PSA Online* is designed to enhance the involvement of the community in MPDC’s Partnership for Problem Solving activities. The plan is select two community-based organizations or active residents in each of the 83 PSA’s to participate in the project. The criteria for selecting the organizations and residents will ensure equal participation. Community leaders including members of the District Advisory Committees, COPSAC Citizen Advisory Board in consultation with MPDC will develop well-defined criteria for the selection of host organizations or individuals. Host organizations and individuals will participate in orientation training in the operation of the hardware and software. The selection criteria requirements will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards to ensure removal of barriers limiting access to end-users with disabilities in public facilities. The placement of two Nick’s at the 26 Parks and Recreation Learning Centers will also ensure that all residents have access to the information sharing that would be available on *PSA Online*. The proposed *PSA Online* design will include an on-line tutorial for intermediate and advanced end-users. Pictorial manuals and a help desk telephone number will be available on site for new end-users.

Capital Communities are neighborhoods in transition that are targeted for the investment of capital resources. The goal is to build safe, healthy and revitalized neighborhoods and transform them into first rate “Capital Communities.” There are currently six Capital Communities, one located in six separate police districts. Outreach Coordinators, funded by the Byrne Memorial Formula Block Grant, located in each Capital Community, will outreach under-represented minorities (including Hispanic and Asian-Pacific islanders) and refer them to host organizations and individuals in their efforts to institutionalize collaborative problem solving with community, police and city agencies. Outreach efforts will initially focus Capital Communities where model projects will be developed to support neighborhood problem solving efforts and later expanded to all 83 PSAs.

EVALUATION, DOCUMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION

Each component of MPDC's community-policing initiative, including the creation of *PSA Online* has been developed, so that each respective impact and outcome can be evaluated separately. The overall design of *PSA Online* provides an integrated capability to collect and disseminate data in a form that can be used to establish its impact on the community as well as MPDC's ability to reduce crime.

MPDC will employ a three-level process and outcome evaluation methodology. The first level of evaluation will entail surveying and interviewing the end users through PSA meetings to determine the contribution of *PSA Online* to meeting the overall goal of reducing crime. The second level of evaluation will occur internally at MPDC. Sampson Annan, Director of Research and Resource Development (RRD) in the Office of Organizational Development, will coordinate the evaluation of *PSA Online*. RRD is the research arm of MPDC. It plays a key role in working with District and PSA commanders to define and measure outcomes related to community policing efforts.

MPDC plans to select one of the local universities, on a competitive basis to conduct process and impact evaluation of the project. The evaluation will seek to answer the following questions:

- Has *PSA Online* helped to reduce crime and the fear of crime in your neighborhood?
- Has it changed the way community members' view MPDC and their local PSA?
- Has the *PSA Online* contributed to changing how they see their role in crime solving activities?
- Has the level of community participation in problem solving increased?
- How many residents use *PSA Online* or receive information it provides?
- Is the web front end easy to access and use?
- Have the residents participated in Web page changes and modifications?

MPDC anticipates that *PSA Online* will become a model for police departments across the country. Utilizing a unique two-way communication approach through the Internet makes *PSA Online* a test-bed for community policing.