

Final Draft

Research in Brief

**Community Policing and Accreditation: Compatibility or Conflict?**

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Community policing and law enforcement agency accreditation are two of the most significant police reform initiatives of the late 20th century. Whether these two major developments, one primarily operational and the other mainly administrative, are compatible or in conflict emerged as a serious issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> The spectacular rise in popularity of community policing in the middle 1990s has made this question that much more timely and important.

The accreditation program, begun in 1979, is based on a manual of standards and is administered by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).<sup>2</sup> This nonprofit organization's governing body consists of 21 members, 11 of whom are law enforcement practitioners and 10 of whom represent other areas of government and the private sector. The process of accreditation involves a self-study phase and an on-site assessment, with final decisions about granting accredited status made by the full Commission. Maintaining accredited status then requires reaccreditation every three years. The accreditation standards (currently numbering 436) underwent a substantial review and revision during 1993-1994.

Community policing (COP), with roots in such earlier developments as police-community relations, team policing, crime prevention, and the rediscovery of foot patrol, has become the dominant new strategy of policing. It is now seen almost universally as the most effective method available for improving police-community relations. Proponents also believe

that it will ultimately prove to be an effective crime control strategy. Indicative of its stature in the 1990s, community policing is required of the 100,000 new police officers funded by the Crime Bill passed in 1994 by the U.S. Congress.

Any study that involves community policing has definitional and measurement challenges. In the initial stages of the project, we were primarily guided by the works of Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, Skolnick and Bayley, and Goldstein in identifying key characteristics of community policing and problem solving.<sup>3</sup> Later, we relied on works by Greene and Mastrofski and by Rosenbaum to identify key conceptual and implementation issues.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, we focused on specific aspects of community policing in our case study sites using a typology of elements and dimensions developed by Cordner.<sup>5</sup>

The issue of compatibility between accreditation and COP takes several forms, but largely comes down to two questions about direct and indirect impact:

- Direct Impact -- Are the police *operations* requirements of accreditation compatible with community policing?
- Indirect Impact -- Are the police *administration* requirements of accreditation compatible with community policing?

The accreditation standards might avoid any direct or indirect incompatibility with COP by virtue of being neutral, flexible, or simply not very demanding. Alternatively, *direct* conflict or support might arise to the degree that the accreditation standards require or encourage particular approaches to the delivery of police services to the public. The standards might

discourage such operational tactics as partnerships with the community and collaborative problem solving, for example, or they might encourage them. Similarly, *indirect* conflict or support might arise to the extent that the standards mandate a specific approach to organizing and managing police agencies. For example, the accreditation standards might discourage citizen input into police policies and priorities or discourage employee empowerment, or they might encourage such administrative practices.

### **Design of the Study**

This study examined the compatibility of community policing and accreditation by using three principal research strategies:

1. **Content Analysis:** separate content analyses of the 897 accreditation standards in effect at the end of 1992 and the revised set of 436 standards published in 1994. Each content analysis was done in three stages: first, three researchers independently coded each standard, then a consensus coding was reached, and then the coding of all standards was reviewed for internal consistency. The standards were coded on 27 variables derived from the literature on community policing and police administration.
2. **Expert Surveys:** a survey sent to the CEOs of 12 case study sites and 12 other "expert" practitioners and academics selected because they had expressed, in person or in published works, particular views about the substantive impact of accreditation or about the implications of accreditation for community policing. The survey sought these experts' evaluations of 14 hypotheses about the intersection of community policing and accreditation.
3. **Case Studies:** case studies of 12 law enforcement agencies that were accredited and also engaged in some form of community policing. Other criteria used in the site selection process included agency size, population diversity, agency type, and regional variation. Each site was visited twice during the study, once for a general

overview and once to focus on some specific aspect of community policing. Substantial documentation was also gathered at each site.

## Findings

The major findings from each of the three research strategies were as follows:

- *Content Analysis* - (1) the accreditation standards do not directly conflict with COP, but neither do they provide strong support for community-oriented or problem-oriented police operations; (2) the standards support a traditional, formalistic approach to police administration, yet they do not particularly require centralization, specialization, or more hierarchy; and (3) the standards are written in such a way that they are overwhelmingly process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. As such, their real impact on the quality and nature of police services delivered to citizens is inherently problematic.
- *Expert Surveys* - (1) neither the 12 case study site CEOs nor the outside experts expressed much support for the likelihood of direct conflict between accreditation and community policing; (2) the outside experts did express support for several varieties of indirect conflict, though, whereas the CEOs thought even indirect conflict was unlikely.
- *Case Studies* - (1) very little evidence of conflict between accreditation and COP was uncovered in any of the case study sites. Some site representatives saw the two reforms as essentially independent while others felt strongly that their accreditation efforts had supported their community policing efforts.

The information derived from these research strategies can be synthesized and further used to evaluate 14 specific hypotheses about possible relationships between community policing and accreditation. These hypotheses posit a wide range of potential direct and indirect effects.

H1: The Anti-COP Hypothesis Little or no support was uncovered for the hypothesis

that accreditation *directly* conflicts with community policing. The accreditation standards do not prohibit community-oriented initiatives nor do they require activities that most COP advocates would shun. All of the case study site chiefs and 70% of the outside experts disagreed with the anti-COP proposition. Very little evidence was found in the case studies of direct conflict between community policing and accreditation.

H2: The Anti-POP Hypothesis Similarly, little or no evidence was found to support the argument that accreditation *directly* conflicts with problem-oriented policing (POP). The standards do not prohibit taking a problem-oriented approach, although they definitely reflect much more of an incident-oriented view of policing. Neither the chiefs nor the outside experts indicated much support for the anti-POP hypothesis, and no evidence for it was found in the case studies.

H3: The Rigid Bureaucracy Hypothesis Some support was found for the proposition that accreditation creates a formal administrative/management system that interferes with COP/POP. The predominant characteristic of the standards is that they require formalization, especially written directives. The standards also tend to support functional specialization of personnel, administrative accountability, and some limits on police officer discretion. Four of the 10 outside experts agreed with the hypothesis: Herman Goldstein worried that accreditation "in its totality and especially its emphasis, creates an attitude and environment that stands in the

way of developing COP/POP."

The evidence for this rigid bureaucracy hypothesis is mixed, however. Although they strongly support formalization, the standards do not particularly encourage centralization, specialized *units*, or more hierarchy. Moreover, several chiefs and outside experts emphasized that all organizations need some structure and parameters. And as then-Chief Michael Gambrill from Baltimore County, Maryland argued, "a formal administrative/management system is not the issue that creates the rigid bureaucracy. It is the degree of rigidity with which the structure is created and maintained that creates conflicts."

H4: The Efficiency Hypothesis Some support was also found for the view that accreditation tends to focus administrative attention on internal organizational matters instead of on substantive problems in the community. The vast majority of the standards (80%+) pertain more to administration than to operations. Twice as many of the outside experts agreed as disagreed with the hypothesis: James Fyfe expressed his dismay that "CALEA standards do not focus more directly on the direct delivery of police services."

All of the case study site chiefs disagreed with the hypothesis, though. Their view, similar to that expressed above in response to the rigid bureaucracy hypothesis, is that police departments *have to* focus considerable attention inwardly on administrative issues and problems, and that accreditation helped them do that more effectively. Generally, these CEOs agreed with the first part of the hypothesis, that the focus of accreditation is internal, but did not

feel that this deflected attention away from substantive problems in the community.

H5: The Thin Blue Line Hypothesis Little evidence was found in support of the hypothesis that accreditation emphasizes police responsibility and accountability to the detriment of community input. The standards do emphasize managerial accountability for a variety of administrative matters within police organizations, but they do not prohibit citizen input and in fact encourage such input with several standards. The type of accountability addressed by the standards generally pertains to internal administrative processes; the standards are largely silent about accountability for community conditions, discretionary decisions, or similar issues about which citizen input would be most germane. No chiefs and only three experts agreed with the hypothesis, but in his comments James Fyfe did lament the fact that real accountability to the public was not stressed more in the accreditation standards and process.

H6: The Style Over Substance Hypothesis Mixed support was found for the hypothesis that accreditation emphasizes process to the detriment of outcomes. Few of the CALEA standards (less than 5%) specify an outcome or even a standard of care that must be met--rather, they typically require that a written directive or other organizational process be in place. The underlying assumption, apparently, is that if a police agency runs itself according to these accepted processes, good outcomes will happen. This would seem to be a risky assumption, however. Moreover, the gulf between accreditation and what actually happens on the street and

in the community might contribute to the view that accreditation is just not that important or relevant in the age of community policing.

Almost all of the chiefs defended this characteristic of the accreditation standards, though. Phil Keith of Knoxville, Tennessee, for example, argued that "it is the agency's responsibility to follow through and be concerned with outcomes." And as Larry Hoover noted, this focus on process rather than outcome is not peculiar to law enforcement, but rather common to accreditation in most fields.

H7: The Incident-Driven Hypothesis Some support was found for the proposition that accreditation reflects an incident-oriented perspective on policing to the detriment of the problem-oriented approach. Those standards that express any perspective on the nature of police work (about 20% of the total) are 4-5 times more likely to be incident-oriented than problem-oriented. The outside experts were split over whether this interfered with POP efforts, though, and the site chiefs did not believe it did. No evidence was found in the case studies that problem-solving was significantly inhibited by accreditation.

H8: The Professional Model Hypothesis The accreditation program was developed during the heyday of the professional model. The standards, taken in their entirety, reflect this lineage in their emphasis on formalization, their focus on administrative matters, and their incident-oriented view of police work. As Jack Greene commented, "it is simply in their nature."

The real issue is whether this characteristic interferes with community policing. The site chiefs did not think so, while the majority of the outside experts did. This disagreement probably parallels those discussed earlier in regard to the rigid bureaucracy and efficiency hypotheses. Some observers see the professional model as the infrastructure or even the launching pad for community policing, while others see it more as a swamp from which police departments must first escape before implementing meaningful COP initiatives.

H9: The Scarce Resources Hypothesis This hypothesis posits that accreditation and COP compete within police agencies for scarce resources and for managerial attention. The implication is that the two initiatives may be programmatically compatible, but nevertheless in conflict because of their cost and complexity. A good bit of support for this proposition was expressed by chiefs and outside experts, although few saw this conflict as irreconcilable or necessitating a choice between the two. Chief Lorne Kramer from Colorado Springs observed that "even though they do compete for resources, the benefits of both are substantial and worth the investment."

H10: The Police Politics Hypothesis Relatively little support was uncovered for the police politics hypothesis, which holds that conflict between accreditation and community policing occurs, not for programmatic reasons, but because the two reforms tend to draw allegiance from competing interest groups within individual police agencies and within the

police industry generally. David Carter noted that "both are in advocacy roles, so one should expect competition," but seemed to reflect the majority view that such competition was not overly divisive or threatening to either initiative. Little evidence was found in the case study sites that community policing and accreditation created warring camps or were even the symbolic battle flags of competing factions.

H11: The Support Hypothesis A number of accreditation standards were found to directly *support* elements of community policing, although, as indicated above, the standards in their entirety reflect the professional model of policing. A solid minority (about 40%) of both the site chiefs and outside experts thought that accreditation supported COP, but the majority of each group disagreed. As will be indicated below, there is probably more evidence that the accreditation process and standards are neutral and/or flexible than that they directly support community policing.

H12: The Neutrality Hypothesis The content analysis concluded that the vast majority of the standards were essentially neutral toward community policing, at least on their face. The site CEOs tended to agree, but the outside experts did not. Gary Sykes commented that the accreditation standards "carry with them a set of assumptions about how the agency should be managed and ... presume a hierarchical organization and bureaucratic culture." Chief Thomas Koby from Boulder, Colorado concurred: "It further institutionalizes a functional management

model in a profession that is service based."

These comments once again illustrate a significant cleavage in thinking about the accreditation vs. COP issue. Some observers view the latent professional model characteristics (both organizational and operational) of accreditation as far from neutral and as contradictory to community policing. Others see the standards as neutral because they simply require administrative structure and consistency while leaving issues of policing philosophy and strategy up to each department.

H13: The Flexibility Hypothesis A majority of both the chiefs and the experts agreed with the hypothesis that police agency accreditation has no direct effect on community policing because of the flexibility of the standards. As the chief from Baltimore County noted, "if this weren't true, we would not be able to do both as we have done for years." The content analysis supported this view, as few of the standards were judged to be very restrictive and few directly supported either COP or any other strategy of policing.

H14: The Null Hypothesis This hypothesis expresses the skeptical view that perhaps (1) accreditation is such a paper tiger that it has no real impact, or (2) community policing is so much more rhetoric than reality that it has no real impact, or (3) both. If any of these three propositions is correct, then we would not expect to find much conflict between accreditation and community policing, because there would be so little substance over which to fight.

Most of the site chiefs and other experts disagreed with this hypothesis. Many echoed the comments of the chief from Colorado Springs: "Both of these philosophies and styles of management have numerous and varied benefits which do not only improve services, address critical issues, solve problems and limit liability exposure but are capable of working together with minimal conflict." The strongest supporter of the null hypothesis was Stephen Mastrofski, who acknowledged the potential of both accreditation and community policing but doubted that either had yet had much impact "at the 'technical' level where the department's work gets done."

The content analysis and case studies provided some support for the accreditation side of the null hypothesis, in three ways. First, as noted, the standards are overwhelmingly process-oriented and administratively-focused. This increases the "paper tiger" possibility--that the reality of accreditation is in the files, not on the street. Second, many of the case study sites indicated that they had not had to make many significant changes in the way they did business in order to become accredited--they simply had to codify and document what they were already doing. Third, in most of the sites ordinary police officers expressed little familiarity with accreditation and cited little evidence that it had affected their work, either positively or negatively.

### **Conclusion**

Table 1-1 summarizes the degree of support found for each of the 14 different hypotheses concerning the relationship between community policing and accreditation.

Based on all of the data from the content analyses, expert survey, and case studies, we would answer four commonly-asked questions about the intersection of community policing and accreditation as follows:

1. Are accreditation and community policing compatible?  
*Yes.*
2. Do accreditation and community policing conflict?  
*Not directly, but there are some indirect tensions and strains between these two reform initiatives.*
3. Does accreditation support community policing?  
*Yes, but only to a limited extent.*
4. Did any of this change with the 1994 "top-down" revision of the CALEA standards?  
*Not much.*

In addition, four other conclusions about the relationship between community policing and accreditation seem to be supported by the research conducted for this study:

1. Whether one sees conflict between COP and accreditation depends significantly on one's view of community policing--especially whether it is seen as a relatively modest departure from the professional model or a more radical departure.
2. A lot also depends on one's philosophy of organization and management. Accreditation clearly emphasizes formalization, for example--but whether this is seen as providing helpful guidance or as strangling creativity varies widely.
3. The effect of accreditation on a police organization and on community policing depends in part on *how* it is implemented. It may include an intense self-study or it may be merely a paper exercise; it may include widespread participation from throughout the agency or it may be imposed top-down; it may incorporate meaningful community participation or it may be pursued more as a public

relations and marketing exercise; and so on.

4. How these two initiatives actually intersect varies from one department to the next and is affected by such things as agency size, sequencing, labor-management relations, pre-existing administrative and operational practices, and other idiosyncratic factors.

One might ask, what does the law enforcement agency accreditation program stand for?

Presently, it stands more for administrative efficiency than for anything else--and this is by conscious design. An important question facing CALEA and the police field is whether the time has come to alter the program's quasi-neutral (on the surface, but with clear latent allegiance to the professional model), flexible nature to make it more supportive of community policing. Advocates of this change argue that it would benefit the community and add more substance and value to the accreditation process. Opponents worry that such a change would reduce the flexibility of the standards and also set a precedent for accreditation to embrace each decade's most popular policing strategy.

A related but separate dilemma facing CALEA is whether the standards could and should be focused less on internal administrative processes and more on operations, standards of care (especially related to encounters with the public), and outcomes. It seems clear that many standards could easily be revised to be less process-oriented and more output- or outcome-oriented. If this was done, the standards would have more substance and would be more closely connected to things that really matter to the public. However, it would become much more difficult for on-site assessors and CALEA to verify compliance with such standards (or, more

likely, to verify that departments were doing everything within reason to produce the specified output, meet the standard of care, or achieve the specified outcome). Standards of this sort might also be more challenging and threatening to police agencies, and denial of accreditation might become more common.

CALEA needs assistance in wrestling with these practical and philosophical dilemmas. Over time, the accreditation process and standards have come to be seen as the domain and property of CALEA staff and constituent accredited agencies (410 as of September 1996) to a greater degree than is probably healthy. Also, CALEA has experienced some distress due to conflicts among its original sponsoring organizations. As a result, a degree of defensiveness and a reactive posture have developed. This situation makes it unlikely that major shifts in focus and emphasis, such as those suggested above, will be given meaningful consideration.

Three responses to this situation may be worthy of consideration. First, CALEA ought to make an effort to improve its own research and development capacity, in order to heighten the amount of attention given to current standards, new standards, and the bigger picture, and to establish a more proactive posture toward ongoing changes in policing. Second, CALEA's sponsoring organizations ought to play more active roles in the big-picture issues surrounding law enforcement agency accreditation and rededicate themselves to the notion that accreditation is about efficiency *and* effectiveness. Finally, everyone concerned about the future of American policing (including academics, elected officials, and community leaders) should pay more attention to these accreditation issues and should participate more actively in the debate over

CALEA's direction and focus.

### Notes

- 1 See, for example, Cornelius J. Behan, "Allies, Not Adversaries: Accreditation and Community Policing," *Commission Update* (Fairfax, VA: Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies, September 1992): 1; Timothy N. Oettmeier, "Can Accreditation Survive the '90s?," in John W. Bizzack, ed., *New Perspectives on Policing* (Lexington, KY: Autumn House Publishing, 1993), pp. 96-112; Gary W. Sykes, "Accreditation and Community Policing: Passing Fads or Basic Reforms?" *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 10,1 (1994): 1-16; and Elizabeth M. Watson and Gerald L. Williams, "Community Policing and Law Enforcement Accreditation: Emerging Issues," in William A. Geller, ed., *Local Government Police Management*, 3rd edition (Washington, DC: International City Management Association, 1991), pp. 392-393.
- 2 For description and analysis of the law enforcement accreditation program, see Cornelius J. Behan, "The Accreditation Process," in James J. Fyfe, ed., *Police Practice in the '90s: Key Management Issues* (Washington, DC: International City Management Association, 1989), pp. 124-134; Sheldon Greenberg, "Police Accreditation," in Dennis Jay Kenney, ed., *Police & Policing: Contemporary Issues* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 247-256; and Stephen Mastrofski, "Police Agency Accreditation: The Prospects of Reform," *American Journal of Police* 5,2 (1986): 45-81.
- 3 Robert Trojanowicz and Bonnie Bucqueroux, *Community Policing: A Contemporary Perspective* (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson, 1990); Jerome H. Skolnick and David H. Bayley, *The New Blue Line: Police Innovation in Six American Cities* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Herman Goldstein, *Problem-Oriented Policing* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990).
- 4 Jack R. Greene and Stephen D. Mastrofski, eds., *Community Policing: Rhetoric or Reality* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Dennis P. Rosenbaum, ed., *The Challenge of Community Policing: Testing the Promises* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).
- 5 Gary Cordner, "Community Policing: Elements and Effects," *Police Forum* 5,3 (July 1995): 1-8.

TABLE 1-1. Summary of Support for 14 Hypotheses About the Relationship Between Community Policing and Accreditation

Hypotheses	Support
<i>The Anti-COP Hypothesis</i> : accreditation directly conflicts with COP	little or no support
<i>The Anti-POP Hypothesis</i> : accreditation directly conflicts with POP	little or no support
<i>The Rigid Bureaucracy Hypothesis</i> : accreditation creates formality which interferes with COP	some support -- mixed opinion
<i>The Efficiency Hypothesis</i> : accreditation's internal focus deflects attention from substantive problems in the community	some support -- mixed opinion
<i>The Thin Blue Line Hypothesis</i> : accreditation emphasizes accountability within the organization to the detriment of accountability to the community	little support
<i>The Style Over Substance Hypothesis</i> : accreditation focuses attention on process rather than outcomes	some support -- mixed opinion
<i>The Incident-Driven Hypothesis</i> : accreditation takes an incident-oriented view to the detriment of the problem-oriented approach	some support -- mixed opinion
<i>The Professional Model Hypothesis</i> : accreditation implicitly favors the professional model over COP	some support -- mixed opinion
<i>The Scarce Resources Hypothesis</i> : accreditation and COP compete for resources and attention	general support
<i>The Police Politics Hypothesis</i> : supporters of COP and accreditation compete for status and influence	little support
<i>The Support Hypothesis</i> : accreditation directly supports COP/POP	some support -- mixed opinion
<i>The Neutrality Hypothesis</i> : accreditation is neutral toward COP/POP	some support -- mixed opinion
<i>The Flexibility Hypothesis</i> : accreditation does not interfere with COP/POP because of the flexibility of the standards	general support

Hypotheses	Support
<i>The Null Hypothesis:</i> no conflict because one or the other (or both) of accreditation and COP has no impact	some support -- but not from chiefs or experts

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