The Role of Oversight in Building Community Trust

By Brian Center

The need to improve trust between law enforcement and the community has become a hot-button, national issue in recent months. Police oversight bodies, which already play a role in this issue by addressing transparency and accountability, provide a natural platform to increase trust-building efforts. The question is, do such bodies have the resources and skill-set to take on a larger role? To date, recommendations by policy experts to improve trust have been framed in vague language—such as advocating for more “community policing” or better training and education—ideas that do not paint a clear road map to success. This vague framing has made it difficult for oversight entities to assess, measure and support law enforcement agencies in a robust way.

In Los Angeles, I was part of several extraordinary examples of transformation in trust, including in gang-dominated neighborhoods where skeptics said it could not be done. While the best strategy to build trust will vary from place to place, it is clear that oversight entities can and should take a more active role in building trust by providing clear guidance and accountability to law enforcement agencies.
President’s Message

Working Together Collaboratively and Proactively

For the nation, as well as for many of our own communities, 2014 was a challenging year. The deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in Staten Island, Ezell Ford in Los Angeles, and Tamir Rice in Cleveland, among others, have lead to impassioned expressions of frustration and anger about inequality, institutional racism, and a lack of police accountability. The intense scrutiny of the police nationwide is unlike anything in recent times. We have also seen mounting anger at prosecutors who are believed to be too close to law enforcement and consistently fail to fully investigate, charge, or prosecute police officers who kill civilians. Organized protests, community dialogues, and calls for action—many of which include a call for establishing or strengthening civilian oversight—arose across the nation, as well as in other countries.

In response, President Obama established the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, among other concrete steps to enhance police accountability. Despite our best efforts, neither accountancy and reform, the brutal murder of two New York police officers shocked and saddened us all. It was truly a national tragedy. We all mourn the terrible loss of Officers Ramos and Liu, as we do any time a law enforcement officer is killed serving their community; our hearts go out to their families, friends, and fellow officers. Every day, dedicated police officers around the country protect the public, assist the vulnerable, and safeguard our rights and freedoms. Police officers face untold trauma, respond when and where others do not or will not, and perform large and small acts of heroism every day. You might say there is no nobler service. Yet the public discourse and rhetoric has turned ugly in places, and has only served to divide and distract us from working together to ask critical questions and offer effective solutions.

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One way that NACOLE can further the conversation and continue to support the work of civilian oversight, law enforcement, and communities across the nation is through its annual conference. This year’s 21st Annual NACOLE Conference, to be held in Riverside, California, promises to be another successful conference. We received a large number of high-quality proposals, and the Board of Directors met at the end of January to discuss the conference, identify goals and set priorities, adopt a budget, and plan for the year ahead, among other tasks.

This is a unique moment in history. The NACOLE Board of Directors and I, as well as our committees and members, are hard at work making sure that NACOLE is, and will continue to be, relevant, with a visible and organized role in the growing dialogue and public and political discourse regarding police accountability.

In this edition of the NACOLE Review, you’ll find articles about the City of Riverside, California, site of the 2015 annual conference, the role of oversight in building community trust, an evaluation of Charlotte’s (NC) oversight mechanism, and several other articles, in addition to a copy of our written testimony for the President’s Task Force. Please regularly check our website, www.nacole.org, for news; job postings; updates and information regarding the annual conference and our regional conferences in Akron (OH), St. Petersburg (FL), and a third location to be determined; our March webinar on predictive policing; and much more. NACOLE, which celebrates 20 years of existence this year, has truly grown into a year-round operation, with programs, events, and services for everyone who works directly in civilian oversight of law enforcement or a related field, or is interested in advancing accountability and transparency in policing and building community trust through civilian oversight. We look forward to continuing to serve our members and our communities in 2015. •

Brian Buchner, NACOLE President

The NACOLE Review

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The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing:
Building Legitimacy and Public Trust Through Civilian Oversight

Submitted by The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement
January 9, 2015

I. Introduction

The current crisis of mistrust and breaking or broken relationships between police and the communities they are sworn to serve and protect is one of the most pressing challenges facing the nation. In communities of color particularly, policing practices that are perceived to be overly harsh, unjust, or unfair, regardless of whether those practices are deemed lawful, can undermine police legitimacy. A single officer-involved shooting has the potential to not only shake the public’s confidence in the police but, as has been seen in Ferguson, Missouri, rock its very foundation. When the members of one racial group are significantly more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, or even shot by the police, maintaining trust becomes immensely more difficult. A lack of transparency only serves to increase the divide.

Time and again, cities everywhere have found themselves scrambling to establish civilian oversight in the wake of a scandal and complaints of law enforcement misconduct (irrespective of whether or not allegations are substantiated). People are demanding changes, but what does it mean when the cry for civilian oversight is issued?

The public expects, and experience has shown, that strong, independent oversight builds legitimacy and public trust, through increased police transparency and accountability to the public served. Oversight fosters accountability through independent investigations or auditing of police misconduct complaints, and also can identify needed changes in police practices and training, provide a meaningful voice or forum for the public, and form a crucial bridge between the public and the police. Just as importantly, oversight encourages enhanced transparency about the work of law enforcement. Increased transparency, trust, and communication between the police and the public, facilitated through effective oversight, can lead to greater cooperation between the police and the public in achieving the ultimate goal of decreased crime and increased public safety.

Importantly, civilian oversight provides a mechanism to bring together the many stakeholders involved in supporting trusted, respectful, and effective law enforcement efforts. Oversight breaks down the walls between police and the public and enhances their understanding of each other by reminding police that they ultimately serve the public’s interests, and by educating the community on the unique and difficult challenges officers encounter every day. While many take polarizing, divisive positions regarding the role of law enforcement, civilian oversight practitioners strive to work collaboratively with all interests involved to ensure careful, unbiased evaluation of facts and policies in order to achieve solutions that address both the needs of police to protect public safety and the needs of the public to trust their police.

Citizen oversight of law enforcement is a critical facet of any well-founded effort to strengthen the relationship between police and communities and to build public trust, all while promoting effective policing. And it is one of the only mechanisms proven to ensure sustainable reforms. Civilian oversight alone is not sufficient to yield the legitimacy in which both the public and law enforcement share an interest; without outside oversight, however, no collection of efforts to secure such legitimacy can be considered complete or directly responsive to the public’s demands for greater participation in, and understanding of, their local law enforcement.

II. Background of civilian oversight of law enforcement and NACOLE

In its simplest meaning, civilian oversight may be defined as one or more individuals outside the sworn chain of command of a police department who take up the task of holding that department and its members accountable for their actions. Contrasted with internal accountability mechanisms commonly found in law enforcement (i.e., internal affairs), independent police review offers a method of civilian involvement in accountability that is often, but not always, external to the department. Its independence from the agency or the sworn chain of command that it seeks to hold accountable allows it to address a wide range of concerns without any actual or perceived bias, and to ensure that policing is responsive to the needs of the community.

Civilian oversight may be established in response to recurring problems in a particular law enforcement agency, such as a pattern or practice of the use of excessive force or repeated complaints of racial profiling. Sometimes oversight is initiated proactively by a local municipality to identify and correct such issues before they become more widespread and difficult to rectify. Often, however, oversight is generated in response to a single, particularly high-profile allegation or incidence of police misconduct. Whatever the circumstances, police oversight is now found in cities and counties both large and small, and in every geographic region of the nation, as well as in other countries.

While practices vary according to the roles of the oversight entity or the laws of its jurisdiction, it is common for civilian oversight agencies to be both an independent source and a repository of qualitative and quantitative data. Oversight agencies may issue public reports on the number, type, and outcome of misconduct investigations; lawsuits; uses of force; or detentions and arrests. They may provide on-scene monitoring of critical incidents, such as officer-involved shootings, or of mass social gatherings, including protests and demonstrations; and they may subsequently provide the public with a singularly independent account of the actions taken by the police, evaluating whether those actions were appropriate under the circumstances or showed a need for some measure of reform. In addition to the issuance of public reports, qualified and experienced oversight entities may also assess a police department's policies, training curricula, and recruitment standards, among other procedures, in order to compare them against the prevailing standards in a perpetually dynamic profession. The effectiveness of oversight in any particular community is dependent on a host of factors including political and budgetary support, ready access to information including police files, records, and performance data, the training and expertise of oversight personnel, and acceptance by the local law enforcement agency and community.

In 1995, as citizen oversight experienced significant growth and expansion across the country—one of several growth periods in the last thirty years—the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) was established as the nation’s only professional association of organizations and individuals working directly in oversight. With hundreds of members across the nation and around the world, NACOLE has legitimized police oversight as a professional field of study and practice and facilitated the development of professional
President’s Task Force Testimony
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III. Defining the role of police in a democratic society
In a democratic society, the principle obligations of the police are to protect citizens’ fundamental rights and freedoms and to prevent crime and disorder. Sir Robert Peel recognized that police must maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police. Peel’s principles form the basis of American law enforcement, and comprise an approach to policing derived almost exclusively from public cooperation, continuously earned and maintained through public approval, trust, and perceptions of legitimacy.

The proper role for police, thus generally defined, is not static. As society changes, what the public expects from police changes. Broadly, the U.S. Constitution provides a framework of limitations for the police, and state legislatures may also pass laws dictating police roles and conduct; but ultimately, the police are required to be responsive to their specific community. However, the needs and views of that community may change over time. Through active dialogues with the public and law enforcement, civilian oversight brings stakeholders together and provides valuable feedback to law enforcement about how their policies and practices are perceived by their specific community, avoiding divisive discourse and toxic rhetoric. Through review of police practices and training, outside auditors and practitioners can help law enforcement identify areas where their perception of their role has become outdated. Oversight also communicates back to the public about how their police force is performing and whether the department’s policies and programs maximize their police force’s performance and provide valuable feedback to law enforcement.

IV. Building a culture of transparency
Civilian oversight, in even its most basic forms, inherently enhances transparency – it allows individuals from outside a law enforcement agency’s sworn chain of command access to the inner workings of that agency, albeit to different degrees. A primary focus of civilian oversight is using this expanded transparency to increase accountability and also to advance community understanding of the work of law enforcement. Police departments are often accused of having an insular culture; those departments that have embraced civilian oversight have been able to neutralize this criticism, and ensure appropriate information is made available for public review. Moreover, in those jurisdictions where strict laws prevent public disclosure of significant amounts of information, a properly designed oversight entity can be the eyes and ears for the public, even if unable to release specific, identifiable information itself.

V. Procedural justice
Central to police legitimacy is the idea of procedural justice: perceptions of fairness in the administration of justice and the fair and impartial exercise of police discretion. And, while officers have an obligation to be impartial and enforce the law fairly, procedural justice also calls upon officers to treat people with dignity and respect, as doing so is equally as important, if not more so. Procedural justice encompasses not only the way an officer interacts with the public, but also requires that members of the public have an effective procedure to raise concerns about police conduct. Unfortunately, individuals who feel they have been wronged by a police officer are often hesitant to approach the department that employs the officer with their concerns. They may feel intimidated, or doubtful that the department will be interested in, or even capable of, taking a truly unbiased look at their concern. Without an alternative procedure to raise concerns about officer behavior, some members of the public are left to conclude that they have no trustworthy, legitimate avenue for such redress and, even more troublingly, view the entire law enforcement “system” as structured in a way for the police to avoid being held accountable.

Outside review of the police provides an opportunity for those who seek to complain against the police to raise their concerns with fellow citizens, who do not fall within the sworn chain of command of the police department. Acknowledging that oversight agencies’ authorities vary from place to place, it is often these agencies that skeptical complainants can turn to in order to feel that their concerns will truly be heard and responded to fairly. Beyond providing procedural justice for specific complaints, overseers can also establish a procedure for review of critical and high profile incidents, such as officer-involved shootings, in-custody deaths, and uses of a TASER, all of which can leave a community clamoring for justice and, potentially, lacking faith in the involved police department’s ability to remain unbiased. Furthermore, as civilian overseers look at individual complaints or critical incidents, they gain unique insights and perspectives that put them in a position to identify systemic issues that are most effectively addressed through a change in department-wide policy or training. Ultimately, this impact on systemic issues can further improve police-public interactions and strengthen the community’s belief that their police are procedurally just.

VI. Protection of civil rights
Police oversight is an important mechanism for ensuring civil rights protections. Civilian oversight has its roots in the Civil Rights Movement. Issues of race and policing are central to the history of oversight, as well as NACOLE. Thus, the oversight community recognizes the important role it plays in identifying, understanding, and addressing discriminatory and unconstitutional police practices. Accordingly, oversight practitioners are at the forefront of investigating, reviewing, and auditing individual cases or patterns of potential civil rights violations, foremost amongst them allegations of racial profiling and biased policing, as well as complaints of illegal searches, excessive force, or unlawful detentions and arrests.

Citizen oversight also helps to ensure police engage in long-term, meaningful outreach to historically disenfranchised and marginalized communities, such as persons with mental illness, the LGBTQ community, homeless individuals, and persons with disabilities. Additionally, independent overseers provide a voice and a forum for these communities, both before and after major incidents involving the police and the police have occurred. As with other types of complaints, police oversight entities improve the overall quality of internal investigation of allegations of bias and discrimination in police encounters. With the backing of civilian oversight, many law enforcement agencies across the nation support and vigorously protect the rights of minority and marginalized communities in their jurisdictions.

VII. Recommendations
1. Ensure that police officers continue to
Charlotte School of Law Civil Rights Clinic Law Students Contribute to Charlotte Review Board Reform

By Jason Huber, Isabel Carson, Esq., and Celia Olson

In 1996, amid already tense community-police relations in Charlotte, North Carolina, a white police officer shot and killed an unarmed young black man. This was the second in a string of white on black police violence, and the trigger that sparked community demand for civilian oversight of law enforcement. In response to community leaders, activists, and concerned citizens’ protests and lobbying efforts, the City Council passed an ordinance creating the Citizens Review Board (“CRB”). However, the instituted review and appeal model lacked investigatory power, binding disciplinary authority, and was further restrained from effective review by insurmountable procedural hurdles. As a result, some suspected that despite the well-intended purpose to bridge community-police relations—a purpose seemingly thwarted by its 0-78 record. The Clinic reached out to city officials, activists, and community leaders to organize a CRB reform campaign throughout the spring and summer of 2013. Concerned citizens reached out to the Clinic and banded together to establish a community coalition, CRB Reform Now, which developed a web presence and media hub for civilian oversight reform. After hearing the community’s outcry, the City invited the Clinic, the coalition, community leaders, and former CRB members to participate in a stakeholder process during the summer of 2013.

At the close of the stakeholder process, in September 2013, another fatal police shooting of an unarmed black man roused community tensions and placed additional pressure on the Charlotte City Council to progress with the reform process.

On Monday, November 25, 2013, City Council members unanimously voted in favor of reforming the CRB. The adopted changes included:
- Extending the time for a complainant to file an appeal from seven days to thirty days
- Providing the CRB with the entire Internal Investigations file rather than a summary of the investigation prepared by the Police Chief
- Changing the threshold burden the complainant must meet before the CRB will conduct a full fact-finding hearing to “substantial evidence of error regarding the disposition of the disciplinary charges entered by the Chief of Police”

WRITE FOR US!
Interested in writing an article for the NACOLE Review?
Have a topic that you would like to see covered in a future issue? Please contact Karen Williams, NACOLE Newsletter committee chair, at NACOLEnewsletter@gmail.com.
Has the Portland Police Bureau Made Progress on the 2009 Plan to Address Racial Profiling?

By Kaysey Crump

As part of my final year of graduate studies at the School of Social Work at Portland State University, I work at the Independent Police Review (IPR) on various projects. IPR is a division of the Portland City Auditor’s Office, and uses an investigative model of oversight, paired with monitoring functions. One of the items that I was tasked with by Director Constantin Severe was to look into the status of the 2009 Plan to Address Racial Profiling, which at the time had been in progress for five years. The 2009 Plan to Address Racial Profiling—commissioned by the Portland Police Bureau (PPB)—was a collaborative project motivated by a series of five community listening sessions on racial profiling held by Mayor Tom Potter and the social justice organization Oregon Action. The content of the 2009 Plan was informed by community input, and consistent with the PPB’s mission, vision, and values.

Within the Plan, the PPB identified four major strategies for addressing racial profiling, listing actionable steps under all four strategies. Since 2013 the City of Portland Human Rights Commission has been collecting anecdotal accounts about the progress, and action (or lack thereof), made by the Bureau. In 2014, I examined the Human Rights Commission accounts and the 2009 Plan.

The first strategy identified in the 2009 Plan seeks to “Create a Bureau that Reflects the City’s Diversity.” The Human Rights Commission discovered some positive movement in the recruitment and training of PPB officer candidates. Between 2005 and 2010, 12% of the newly hired officers were people of color. Numbers reported from 2011 to 2013 showed a noticeable increase in the hiring of officers of color, with a reported 24.7% of new hires being people of color.

In order to recruit and prepare more qualified minority applicants, the Plan identified the need to address barriers for hiring members of the Police Cadet and Reserve Officer programs onto the force. The Cadet program recruits youth ages 16–20 years who are interested in a career in law enforcement. As of 2013 the PPB had created a new pathway for participants in both programs to obtain jobs as police officers. The pathway specifies that individuals with two years post-training service in either program, who have fulfilled the minimum education or military service requirements, are eligible to become police officers.

Another positive step taken by the PPB was the creation of the Police Training Analyst position. Emma Covelli was hired to fill this role. Ms. Covelli had previously worked with the PPB’s Personnel Training Division and the Chief’s Office on Equity, Community Relations, and Issues of Race.

The second strategy identified the need to “Give Officers Concrete Skills to Help Them on the Streets.” The Bureau still has quite a bit of work to do under this strategy, particularly in training lower-level officers on local, historical race relations and interpersonal interactions with the community. The Bureau has started the process of seeking knowledge from other organizations and police departments that have undergone reforms to increase diversity of staffing, and to decrease disproportionate treatment of people of color in the community. They have sought material on equity and awareness around race from the City of Seattle, but would benefit from further outside knowledge and experience.

The third strategy identified in the plan instructs the PPB to “Reach Out to the Community to Build Mutual Trust and Understanding.” While the PPB has several avenues for community engagement and relationship building, there still remain members of the community who are distrustful and disengaged from police officers. The Bureau’s Community and Police Relations Committee has participated in various events involving communities of color in the Portland region, but it would be well-advised to cultivate deeper, more meaningful relationships with these communities.

The final strategy in the 2009 plan seeks to “Collect and Analyze the Right Data on Police Stops.” In 2009, a report titled “Benchmarking Portland Police Bureau Traffic Stops and Search Data” was released by Portland State University’s Criminal Justice and Policy Research Institute (CJPRI). The report provided recommendations involving the reporting and benchmarking of PPB stop data. In February 2014, the PPB released the 2011 stop data along with a lengthy response and report to the CJPRI recommendations. The PPB is under pressure to release these reports in a more timely fashion, in part because of the recent scrutiny facing police departments to report accurate data reflecting disparate treatment of communities of color.

The 2009 Plan to End Racial Profiling continues to receive internal attention, most significantly from the Human Rights Commission, but does not have a built-in means to assure that the City of Portland remains accountable to these goals. The Independent Police Review has an interest in monitoring the progress of the 2009 Plan. As new oversight positions—part of the City of Portland’s Settlement Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice—begin their work, it may be time to more publicly revisit these goals.

Kaysey Crump is currently completing her Master of Social Work degree at Portland State University. Ms. Crump is interested in the interactions between law enforcement and communities of color as well as the LGBTQ community.

2016 Annual Conference Request for Proposals

The NACOLE Board of Directors (Board) invites proposals for the five (5) day Twenty-second Annual NACOLE Conference to be held in September or October 2016 and a three-day planning meeting to be held by the Board in January or February of the same year. The Annual Conference attracts more than 300 participants from across the United States and internationally. NACOLE conferences provide extensive workshops, training sessions, panel discussions, and plenary presentations to further the training and development of those involved in civilian oversight of law enforcement.

All proposals must be received by April 1, 2015, to be considered.

To download a copy of the 2016 Annual Conference RFP in either Microsoft Word or PDF, please visit http://www.nacole.org/annual-conference/.
As I See It:

How Citizen Oversight Can Keep Electronic Surveillance in Check

By Dave Maass

At the 2014 NACOLE conference, you honored Kelly Davis and me with your contribution to oversight award for our reporting that exposed undisclosed deaths in San Diego County jails. I am humbled by the recognition, and, although I no longer work at San Diego CityBeat, you have encouraged me to continue covering the issue. I would also like to use this opportunity to bring an unrelated, emerging issue to your members’ attention.

I currently work at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a non-profit organization based in San Francisco that defends civil liberties in the digital world. EFF’s efforts range from suing the National Security Agency over its mass surveillance programs to demanding transparency of local governments’ use of spy technology. We often run into walls with agencies that claim secrecy trumps public disclosure when it comes to releasing details about these privacy-invasive programs. In some cases, the companies selling the technology have imposed contract terms that forbid agencies from publicly discussing the programs. That’s where citizen oversight boards must step in and investigate law enforcement agencies’ use of mass surveillance technologies.

Citizen oversight boards are often charged with examining violations of the Fourth Amendment and state laws, but typically those investigations are in response to citizen complaints. It’s easy for a citizen to recognize unjust physical-world illegal searches and seizures: they witness firsthand when an officer enters their home or impounds their vehicle. In contrast, searches of electronic data like your email or phone records are invisible, and it is very difficult for citizens to find out how and when these searches occur and what data law enforcement agencies collect on them.

Yet, when law enforcement agencies use electronic surveillance technologies—including tools that collect information on large portions of the population without any particularized suspicion—it can result in privacy violations also on a massive scale. In these cases, it’s not just one citizen who is harmed, but every citizen, particularly if police use this technology to monitor citizens engaged in First Amendment-protect activities such as political organizing or religious worship.

Technologies of concern include automatic license plate readers, facial recognition devices, fake cell phone towers (often called “Stingrays”), networked CCTV cameras, GPS tracking devices, and drones.

Law enforcement agencies often embrace these tools because of the “wow” factor, despite a lack of evidence that these tools are even effective in reducing crime. They also adopt these electronic surveillance programs knowing that legislators and policymakers lag far behind in their ability to regulate the use of new police technologies. Law enforcement agencies are very aware that once they start using them, politicians are reluctant to take those powers away for fear that they may be portrayed as soft on crime.

In attempting to use public records laws to obtain information about electronic surveillance programs, organizations such as EFF are often denied access by law enforcement agencies that claim that revealing this information to the public would reveal sensitive investigative practices. That is why oversight boards are in a unique position to advocate on behalf of the public.

Many oversight boards are able to examine confidential records, issue subpoenas and compel testimony in closed session. You should seek access to information about these programs, hold hearings about these technologies, and issue recommendations to balance civil liberties with public safety. You should ask questions about how information is collected, whether warrants are required, who has access to the collected data, and how long agencies retain this data when it’s not connected to a specific crime. You should also review agencies’ privacy policies and investigate how often these policies are violated, resulting in so-far unknown civil rights violations.

This issue is only going to intensify over the next decade, and I urge your organization and members to ensure accountability when elected leaders give law enforcement agencies a free pass with technology.

EFF is always willing to serve as a resource on these issues. Please do not hesitate to drop me a line if we can help inform your work in any way.

Dave Maass is an investigative researcher at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and contributor to San Diego CityBeat. He can be reached at dm@eff.org.

Scholarships Available!

The NACOLE Annual Scholarship Fund is an opportunity for individuals to seek financial support to attend the 21st Annual NACOLE conference in Riverside, California from October 4–8, 2015.

The scholarships are open to a diverse group of individuals including current members, students, community members, and individuals interested in the oversight of law enforcement. Scholarship applications will be available online at www.NACOLE.org and are due May 1.

SAVE THE DATE!

The 21st Annual NACOLE Conference
October 4–8, 2015
The Mission Inn and Riverside Convention Center
Riverside, California
Building Community Trust
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community to community, my experience demonstrated that it is possible to create a more detailed, defined framework that could be used to help guide and empower oversight agencies in the relationship-building process, regardless of location.

As one example, general efforts to engage in community policing often miss an important population—those in conflict with the police. We have seen agencies declare community policing a success when, in fact, they only have community, and dysfunctional, explosive relations with those who officers are uncomfortable interacting with. This population, however, is critical to success. They are the ones who end up engaged in use of force incidents and may be more likely to react strongly when a use of force is perceived as inappropriate. In Los Angeles, we learned that once key community members are identified, simply ordering officers to interact with them through meetings or community patrols is not sufficient. A clear plan, based on best practices from conflict resolution, must be in place.

For instance, when two people are in significant conflict, they, in general, have a hard time hearing each other. One basic practice of conflict resolution, therefore, is to engage a neutral, third party to help. Law enforcement agencies, however, often make the mistake of trying to do it all themselves, without the help of someone trained in best practices for conflict resolution. Institutionalized best practices, in turn, give an oversight agency an established framework with which to judge and document trust-building efforts. Common efforts, such as town hall meetings, citizen academies, community events or patrols, could then be measured, in part, by whether they are grounded in a strategy that has been proven to work in getting people from different points of view to understand each other.

In short, if we reframe community trust away from vague language like “community policing” toward detailed strategies steeped in best or promising practices, oversight agencies can develop the tools and skill sets needed to play an important role in strengthening trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Of course, to engage in more nuanced, detailed and intensive efforts, the law enforcement agency, city, county or private funders must provide adequate support and funding to police departments and oversight bodies to make relationship building a priority and a reality. It takes money or resources to assess and document trust-building efforts, bring in a skilled facilitator, free up officers to attend meetings, and engage with the community in a consistent, thoughtful manner. Departments cannot do this on their own.

But, as we have seen over the past few months, the cost of building relationships is minuscule compared to the damage caused by not having them.

Brian Center is the founder of Center Solutions, a consulting group of law enforcement and organizational management professionals, based in Los Angeles, CA. He previously spent over 5 years helping build relationships between community members, law enforcement, and government agencies while running a gang intervention non-profit in South and Central Los Angeles.

Charlotte
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“In short, if we reframe community trust away from vague language like “community policing” toward detailed strategies steeped in best or promising practices, oversight agencies can develop the tools and skill sets needed to play an important role in strengthening trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.”

- Changing the standard at the full fact-finding hearing to “whether, by the greater weight of the evidence, the Chief of Police clearly erred”
- Providing “cultural awareness training” for the CRB members and enhancing the visibility of the complaint and hearing process of the CRB

While these changes do mark progress, they still fall short of what the Clinic and coalition proposed. First, although the Board facilitates a neutral, fact-finding forum with compulsory processes in which individuals may air their grievances, it continues to only review the Police Chief’s decision. Second, the new standard of review is eerily akin to an abuse of discretion standard. And third, at no point is the Board empowered to actually make a determination that police misconduct did or did not occur. Rather, the focus of the Board’s review relates only to overseeing the Police Chief’s decision.

Despite these shortcomings, the changes which the Clinic, CRB Reform Now, and the Charlotte City Council created represent substantial progress in community police relations. These changes will continue to increase the Board’s transparency, make it more likely that the Board will conduct hearings versus summarily dismissing complaints, and ensure that the Board receives detailed information concerning what transpired during an internal affairs investigation. Only time will tell if these changes will help balance the Board’s historical record. But at least it’s a start.

For more information, please visit the Civil Rights Clinic Blog at cscivilrights.com.

City Council Members and then Mayor Anthony Foxx discussing CRB reform in April 2013.

Jason Huber is an Associate Professor at Charlotte School of Law and the Supervising Attorney for the Civil Rights Clinic; Isabel Carson is a graduate of Charlotte School of Law and a licensed NC Attorney; Celia Olson is a third year student at Charlotte School of Law.
shopping and world-class dining at several restaurants and lounges. Step outside of the hotel located in Riverside's exciting downtown, and you are only a few minutes walk from countless restaurants, bars, coffee shops, historical landmarks, museums, live theaters, antique and boutique stores. In close proximity to the hotel are beautiful parks and nature preserves, which offer a host of walking, hiking and biking trails. In other words, you won't need a vehicle to work, learn, network and be entertained in Riverside!

When planning your trip, consider flying into our closest and most convenient airport, the Ontario International Airport, located a short distance away and easily accessible by taxi, on-site car rentals and shuttles. For those of you who may be driving to the conference, there is guest parking at the hotel and for those of you who may only be attending daily or during portions of the conference, there is ample parking at the Riverside Convention Center.

We at the Riverside CPRC want to afford you with a variety of locations and establishments where you can network with one another in comfort and style. The conference sessions will be held at our newly renovated 66,000 square foot Riverside Convention Center, located just a few steps from your hotel. All changes incorporated into the new Convention Center were made with utmost attention to detail to provide guests with open plaza areas, exhibit halls, ballrooms and meeting facilities. It boasts leading-edge technology to enhance not only the learning environment for attendees, but also the ease with which NACOLE conference presenters can share their knowledge. Be prepared to be delighted by the Convention Center's on-site catering and professional staff as well.

We understand that NACOLE always provides a conference full of training opportunities. But NACOLE is also steeped in tradition for the special events that take place at the conference. It is our pleasure to host you for the Sunday Welcome Reception at our historic Riverside County Courthouse. The Beaux-Arts styled courthouse was completed in 1904 and boasts amazing exterior architecture and a beautifully restored interior. We invite you to relax and enjoy the food, beverages and entertainment as you check in for the conference. Additionally, we know how important the Wednesday night Sankofa reception is. We do not want to give away all of the details, but be prepared to share in an enjoyable evening in a beautiful setting.

In addition, we look forward to sharing “our story.” As is the case with the implementation of many oversight organizations, ours too had a sad beginning. But as you arrive in Riverside, know that the CPRC will be celebrating its 15th anniversary. In these 15 years, there has been tremendous growth and understanding that would not have been possible without the hard work and tireless hours served by our volunteer commissioners. The service goes far beyond the required monthly meetings. Commissioners unselfishly attend several community and police outreach events throughout the year. We hope that by sharing our story, it might make a difference as you serve on and create new oversight organizations. All of our commissioners will be easily identifiable at the conference and will make themselves available to answer any questions you may have.

The CPRC looks forward to hosting you in our beautiful city of Riverside. The conference will be full of networking and educational opportunities, but please plan to come to Riverside early or stay for a few days afterwards. There's so much to see and do here and we hope you will take advantage of our beautiful location and wonderful fall weather. See you in October!

Robin Jackson is the Chair of the Community Police Review Commission in Riverside, California.