Program Evaluation Summary
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Community Policing in Chicago, Years Eight and Nine

Prepared by the Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium

The Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium is coordinated by the Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. It also includes faculty and students from the University of Illinois at Chicago. The Consortium is supported by grants from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

This is the seventh report examining Chicago's community policing program, Chicago's Alternative Policing Strategy, or CAPS. This summary report presents an overview of evaluation efforts since the release of the Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium's last report in November 2000.[1]

Trends in crime

Since 1991 there has been a steady decline in virtually every crime category in Chicago. The largest decline has been in robbery, which dropped by 58 percent between 1991 and 2001. Robberies with a gun went down by 62 percent, while those involving some other weapon (or none at all) went down by less – 55 percent. Serious assault and battery declined by 40 percent. Gun-related assaults went down a bit faster, as did assaults in domestic situations. On the other hand, gang-related assault did not decline at all. In the property crime category, motor vehicle theft was down by 42 percent. Burglary went down 50 percent, and simple property thefts declined 26 percent over the same period. While crime rates were dropping nationally during the same period, the drop in crime in Chicago was noticeably greater in most categories.

The exception to this is the murder rate. Chicago's homicide rate declined more slowly than it did for the nation as a whole: the local murder rate dropped by 31 percent, while the national rate dropped by 41 percent. The year 2001 also saw an actual increase in the city's murder total, from 631 to 666 cases, before it dropped again to 600 in 2002. Over time, the ability of Chicago police to solve the murders that do occur has declined as well. Murders have become more closely associated with gang activity and drug markets, and those types of murders tend to be more difficult to solve.

Since 1991, crime has declined in almost all areas of the city, but it has declined most dramatically in

ICJIA
Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor
Candice M. Kane, Executive Director
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

120 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 1016
Chicago, Illinois 60606

Phone: 312-793-8550, TDD: 312-793-4170,
Fax: 312-793-8422
website: www.icjia.state.il.us

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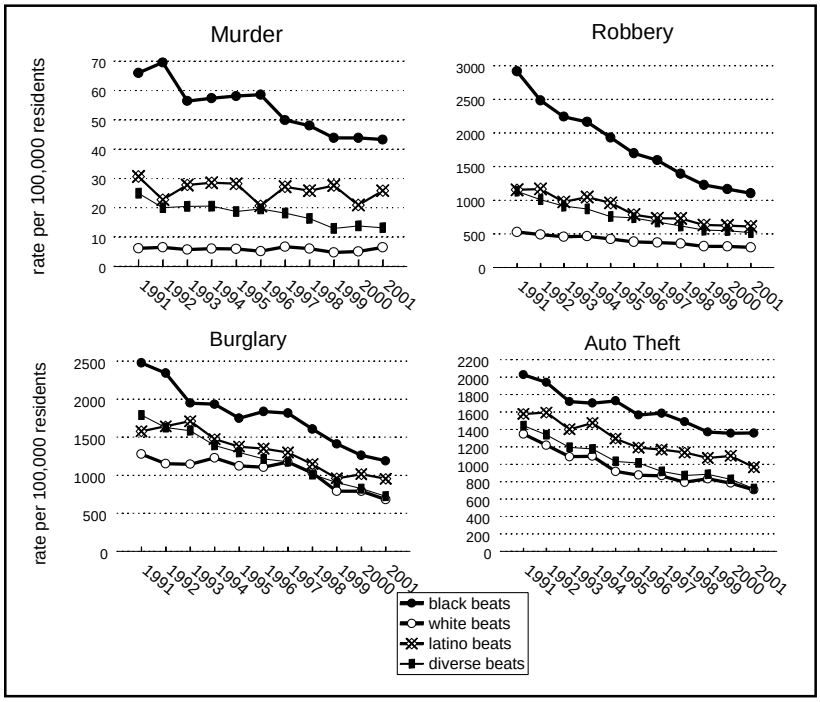
[1] The full 2002 report and copies of earlier reports can be found at the Institute for Policy Research website (www.Northwestern.edu/IPR/policing.html) or they can be requested from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Figure 1



African-American communities **(Figure 1)**. Crime rates generally declined the least in predominately white areas, where they were not very high to start with. By the beginning of the 21st century, Chicago was a substantially safer place than it was 11 years before, and residents of African-American neighborhoods have seen much of the improvement. Compared to 1991, in 2001 almost 300 fewer people were murdered in predominately African-American areas of the city, and 1,100 fewer were raped. Gun crimes in those areas dropped by 17,400 incidents, and 17,675 fewer people were robbed in predominately African-American beats in 2001.

Trends in neighborhood problems

CAPS involves problem solving on a broad scale, focusing on a wide range of neighborhood concerns in addition to crime. These include both physical decay (including abandoned buildings, abandoned cars, loose trash, and graffiti) and social disorder (public drinking, loitering, and disruption in schools). The evaluation has tracked concern about these problems using regular surveys of city residents.

The consortium's surveys revealed that between 1994 and 2001, many Chicago residents perceived no particular improvements in the physical condition of the city's neighborhoods. Only concern about graffiti, which was the special focus of several new city initiatives, showed a substantial decline. In the social disorder category, only concern about loitering dropped in any substantial way.

However, as in the case of crime, the surveys revealed dramatic variations in Chicago resident's views of their neighborhoods. The success of this aspect of CAPS depended on who you were and where you lived. The most important factor was race. **Figure 2** tracks residents' views of four problems in their neighborhood: public drinking, disruption around schools, abandoned cars, and graffiti. From the point of view of white residents, conditions stayed about the same or improved somewhat during the course of the 1990s. Whites reported few serious problems in 1994, when the surveys began, and in most categories they reported somewhat fewer problems at the end. By most measures, conditions improved considerably for African-Americans. They reported less concern about physical decay and most forms of social disorder over time. However, the city's Latinos at best held their ground during the course of the 1990s, and by many measures things actually took a turn for the worse. Especially for Spanish-speakers, levels of social disorder and physi-

Figure 2

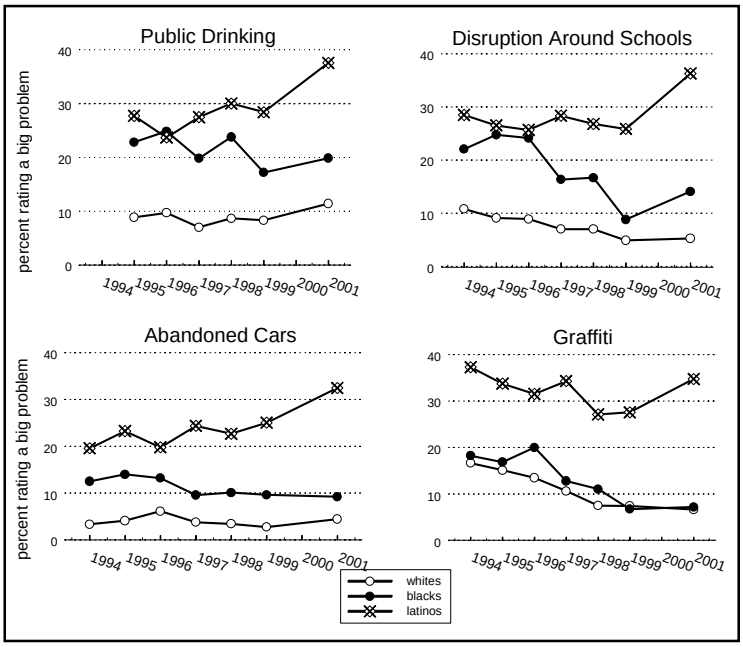
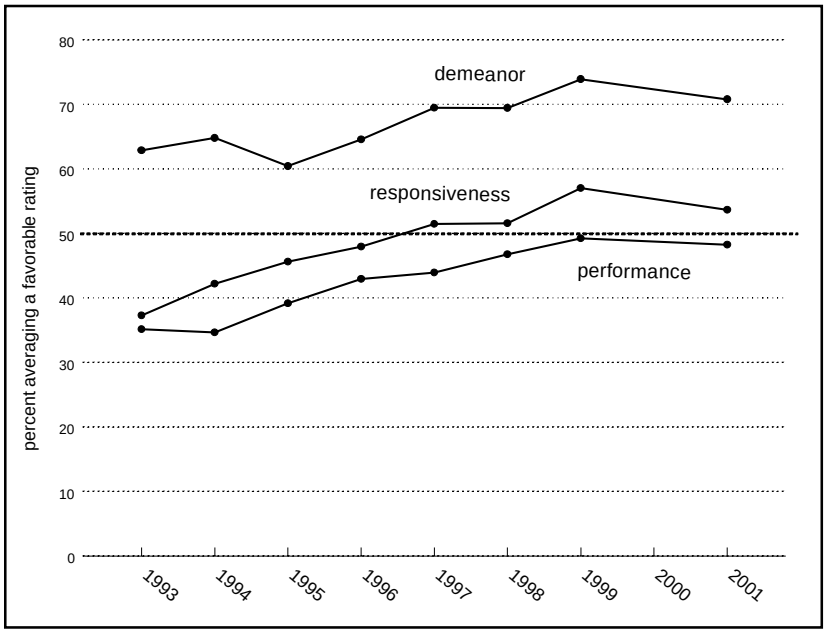


Figure 3



cal decay appeared substantially higher in 2001 than in 1994.

Public views of the police.

The same surveys can be used to describe trends in the reported quality of police service in the city. The consortium's surveys monitored the views of residents concerning police effectiveness, community outreach and service delivery. Before CAPS was launched, a majority of Chicagoans did not have a very positive view of the police. Less than 40 percent thought they were responsive to community concerns, and fewer still thought they were doing a good job at preventing crime and helping victims. They were seen as fairly polite and helpful, but not very effective.

Public opinion improved significantly during the course of the 1990s. As can be seen in the demeanor index in **Figure 3,** by 2001 more than 70 percent of those surveyed thought police were being polite and helpful. Nearly 55 percent thought police in their neighborhood were responsive to public concerns. The police did worst in our three measures of performance. On average, less than half of Chicagoans thought police were doing a satisfactory job at preventing crime, keeping order, and helping victims.

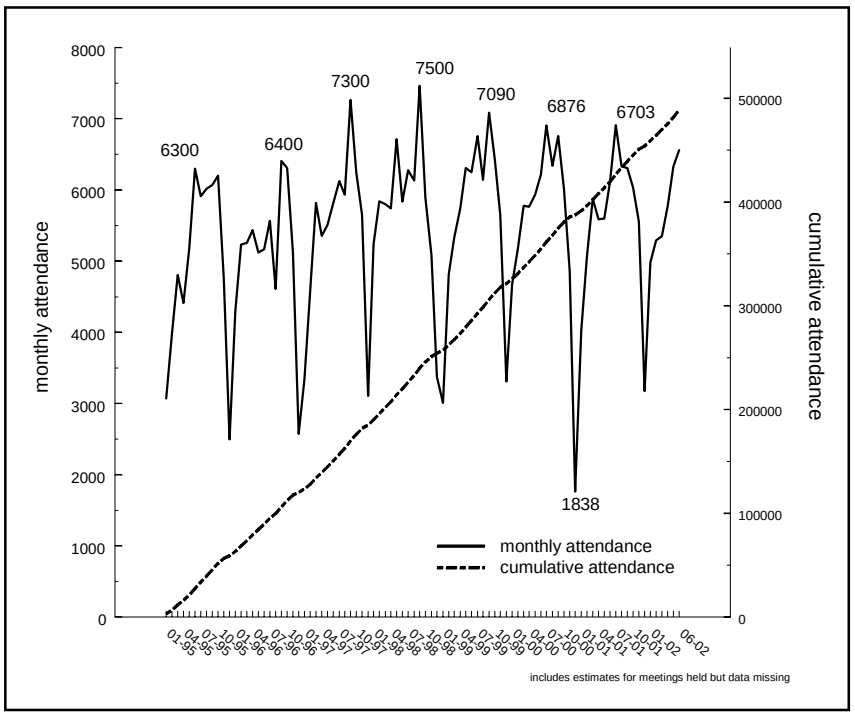
These improvements could be seen among all major groups. Whites, African-Americans and Latinos all gave the police higher ratings than they did prior to CAPS. Among African-Americans and Latinos, perceptions of the police changed most on the responsiveness dimension, improving by about 20 percentage points. However, our surveys indicate that there is still ample room for improvement. After eight years of community policing, a little less than half the public thought that police were doing a good job at preventing crime, helping victims and maintaining order, and only a few more thought they were doing a good job responding to community concerns. "Helping victims" was the lowest-rated form of service included in the surveys; by this measure, police were not seen as responding to the needs of some of their most important customers. The large gap that existed between the races in 1993 persisted through 2001. The consortium's summary of trends in Chicago is that "the glass" representing city residents' views of about police went from being "less than half full" to "a little more than half full."

Trends in citizen involvement

Chicago's community policing initiative features important roles for the public. Beat community meetings are one of the most distinctive features of Chicago's community policing program. They are regular monthly gatherings of groups of residents and officers working in the area. Beginning in mid-1993, police began holding neighborhood meetings for beats in the prototype districts. By the spring of 1995 these meetings were being held in church basements and park buildings all over the city. In the CAPS plan, beat community meetings are the principal mechanism for building and sustaining close relationships between police and the general public. The meetings are to provide a forum for exchanging information, and a venue for identifying, analyzing and prioritizing problems in an area. They are a very convenient place to distribute announcements about upcoming community events, circulate petitions, and call for volunteers to participate in action projects. The meetings also provide occasions for police and residents to meet face to face and get acquainted, a feature that was facilitated by the formation of teams of officers with permanent beat assignments. As they have evolved, beat community meetings have become a venue for regular reports by police to the community on what they had done since the last meeting about the problems that had been discussed. They are designed to provide an occasion for residents to report on their own problem-solving efforts, but this happens fairly infrequently.

As **Figure 4** indicates, attendance at the meetings is very seasonal – low in the winter and high in the summer. It was lowest during a month-long siege of near-record snow and low temperatures in December

Figure 4



2000. Attendance has remained remarkably stable, averaging about 6,000 persons per month. Chicagoans attended beat community meetings about 59,000 times during 1995. The figure for 1997 was almost 65,000, and in 2001 66,600 residents showed up. Over the 90-month period between January 1995 and June 2002, more than 488,000 Chicagoans attended about 21,000 beat meetings. In a citywide survey conducted in 2001, 16 percent of Chicagoans said they had attended at least one beat meeting in the previous year.

An analysis of participation levels indicates that beat meeting attendance rates are often highest in places that can benefit the most from them. Once population is taken into account, attendance rates are highest in the city's predominately African-American beats and lowest in predominately white areas. In general, attendance rates are higher in lower-income areas where people do not have much education. They are also high in areas where other institutions, including schools and the health care system, have failed to serve residents very well. Participation is highest in high-crime areas, and concern about crime is an important factor motivating people to attend the meetings. Our surveys of those who attend the meetings show that they are more concerned about crime and other neighborhood problems than are their neighbors. We also found that the average participant attends 5.7 meetings during the year. Beginning in 2002, meetings in a number of beats plagued by low turnout were merged with those in adjacent beats in order to boost attendance. The police also began to experiment with holding meetings at new times and days, including – for the first time – on Saturdays.

Our surveys of city residents indicate that awareness of beat community meetings by members of the public was stable during the course of the 1990s, but dropped a bit in 2001. The biggest gap in awareness that meetings are taking place is between homeowners (at 71 percent in 2001) and renters (only 51 percent). Awareness is high among Chicagoans over age 50 and low among those who did not graduate from high school. Awareness among African-Americans has consistently outpaced that of whites (by about five percentage points during most of the 1990s), and Latinos (by 15 percentage points, and by 20 percentage points for those whose interviews were conducted in Spanish).

Residents who attend beat meetings are often involved in other CAPS-related activities. A 2002 survey of attendees found that 12 percent reported participating in "smoke outs," CAPS picnics or barbecues. Participation in neighborhood watches and patrols was surprisingly popular, reported by 21 percent of those attending. Court Advocacy is an official CAPS project that is sponsored by the district's advisory committees, and 11 percent of those attending beat meetings reported some involvement in that effort. "Vote Dry" is the common label for efforts to close down troublesome liquor establishments in the city using a referendum process, and 12 percent indicated they had been involved in that or some other liquor control project. Beat activism of this sort is more common in lower-income, African-American areas of the city; where health problems and low school test scores are also an issue; and in areas with high rates of violent crime.

What happens at beat meetings?

During the summer of 2002, the consortium attended more than 290 meetings held in a sample of 130 beats in order to observe what went on. During meetings our observers also distributed questionnaires to residents and police who were present. Many of the meetings were held in local churches (28 percent), park district field houses (23 percent) and schools (15 percent). An average of 25 residents attended. The smallest meeting

held was attended by 3 residents, and the largest by 125. An average of seven police officers (and as many as 12) were there. Almost all meetings began at 6:30 or 7 p.m., and the average gathering lasted 58 minutes. Police have attempted to accommodate the city's burgeoning Latino population by producing Spanish-language CAPS materials, but handouts were available only in English at 83 percent of the meetings. Also, only 4 percent of the meetings the consortium attended featured even a little translation of the proceedings into any other language.

In surveys distributed to those present, the consortium asked how often they had attended beat meetings in the past year. Twenty percent indicated that this was their first meeting, while 9 percent indicated that they attended every month. Frequent attendance is crucial to overall attendance at beat community meetings, because those who come often contribute disproportionately to the yearly attendance total. For example, the 9 percent of residents attending every meeting compose 23 percent of the total attending over the course of a year, because they are always there.

Our observers noted the topics that were discussed at the meetings. Only issues raised by residents are examined here. Drugs were one of the most commonly discussed problems; residents expressed concern about drug sales or use at 62 percent of the meetings. Drug problems were discussed most frequently in meetings held in poor and predominately African-American beats where violent crime rates are high and many crimes that take place involve guns. These are also beats where residents report the most dissatisfaction with police working in the area. Physical dilapidation was another frequent topic at beat community meetings, discussed by residents 47 percent of the time. This category includes concern about abandoned or run-down buildings, abandoned cars, graffiti and other forms of vandalism, litter and trash, illegal dumping, loose garbage in alleys and overflowing dumpsters. Discussion about physical decay was most frequent in poorer areas with many vacant buildings, low rents, and plagued by both personal and property crime as well.

In the 44 percent of beats where parking and traffic problems were discussed, residents expressed concern about traffic congestion, parking and double parking, speeding, running stop signs, and reckless or drunken driving. Parking and traffic problems were discussed most frequently in better-off areas where there were relatively few problems. The police who attend meetings in these beats agreed, for they also gave the areas low problem ratings. Beats emphasizing parking and traffic had low meeting turnout rates, and few residents who attended reported much CAPS activism. They are predominately higher-income, white collar areas with high rents and home values.

Beats where the discussion focused on gangs have a much different profile. Overall, gangs and gang-related violence were brought up at 29 percent of the meetings we observed. Specific concerns that were voiced included intimidation by gangs, outbreaks of gang graffiti, gang recruiting and gang loitering. In Chicago, gangs are a visible problem in heavily Latino beats. Residents who came to meetings there were also vocal about graffiti problems and public drinking. Gang problems were frequently discussed in areas that are home to large families, where schools are overcrowded, and where unattached males are also concentrated. Gang problems were most frequently discussed in areas where people have little education and many households where no one speaks English.

Concern about property crime was voiced at 38 percent of the meetings we attended. The most frequent issues were home and garage burglary, car break-ins and auto theft, car vandalism and general theft. Confidence games aimed at senior citizens were also discussed. Property crime was more often a subject for discussion in better-off areas of the city, and in predominately white beats that are home to concentrations of senior citizens. On the other hand, residents who attend beat community meetings there generally report little concern about personal crime. Personal crime was discussed at just 22 percent of the meetings. The issues raised by residents included robbery, purse snatching, domestic violence and sexual assault.

Various forms of social disorder were discussed at 89 percent of the meetings. This category included a long list of minor offenses, as well as conditions that are not criminal but that frequently disturb neighborhood residents. The list of problems discussed included prostitution, public drinking, panhandling, curfew or truancy violations, disturbances by teenagers, public exposure, gambling, trespassing, and landlords who lose control of their buildings. Concern about social disorder was so widespread that it was not closely associated with any particular neighborhood feature.

One of the issues residents discussed was policing. In fact, negative comments or complaints about the police were aired at 44 percent of the meetings. The most frequent complaints were about the speed or quality of police responses to 911 calls. This was followed by complaints that there were not enough police serving the area, or that they were not visible enough. Negative comments about the police were more common in predominately African-American areas that are neither extremely poor nor well-off, and where many lower-income homeowners are

concentrated. Crime rates are not particularly high in these areas, although school truancy is. Surveys of officers at the meetings reveal that they do not come to beat community meetings very regularly and have little contact with residents who do, except when they attend.

Model beat meetings

Police have a vision of how beat community meetings are to be conducted and what is supposed to happen there: they are to be a place to share information, identify problems and make action plans. Both police and citizens are expected to take responsibility for problem-solving projects, and beat community meetings provide a venue for everyone to review their progress and assess how well they are doing. One goal of the 2002 study was to examine how closely activities in the field reflected the plans made downtown. To do this, the observation form completed at each meeting gathered information on the elements of a "model meeting."

Were the meetings well run? Observers reported that there was a clear agenda, either printed or clearly announced, for 84 percent of the meetings. On the other hand, minutes or summaries of the previous meeting were presented in some fashion at only 30 percent. Under the department's guidelines, for each beat a civilian "facilitator" — among whose tasks are to help organize and conduct public events — is supposed to be identified. The observers noted that civilian facilitators actually were present at 75 percent of the meetings.

Observers also judged the overall effectiveness with which the meetings were run and concluded that about 12 percent were poorly conducted. Just over 55 percent were fairly effectively managed, and 32 percent were judged to be very effectively run. The police officers who played leadership roles got somewhat higher marks than the civilians; just over 60 percent of the civilian leaders at the meetings were judged to be fairly or very effective, compared to 85 percent of police leaders. However, meetings led jointly by police and a resident, were judged to be even better run, but they constituted only 5 percent of the meetings.

There was also a fair degree of information sharing by police. Department guidelines call for crime information to be distributed at beat community meetings, and this usually happened. The department's crime analysis system can produce a variety of reader-friendly maps, crime lists and reports, and the consortium's observers reported that either crime maps or printed crime reports were passed out at 88 percent of the meetings.

There was a great deal of variation in the extent to which different elements of Chicago's problem-solving model were enacted at beat community meetings. All of the officers in the department's patrol division have been trained to employ a five-step process that features identifying and analyzing problems, developing and implementing solutions to them, and assessing the effectiveness of what they have accomplished. These problem-solving steps were also woven into the curriculum of the massive training program for neighborhood residents that was conducted in 1995 and 1996. Observers found that the most frequently met standard on the list was that there was a discussion of beat issues and problems were identified at every meeting. Most problems were identified by residents who were present, and police dominated the discussion of problems at only 11 percent of the meetings. There were usually discussions about how to solve them as well. The observers noted that solutions were proposed for problems that were discussed at 77 percent of the meetings. As in our earlier studies of these meetings, most solutions were proposed by police. When it came to debating or "brainstorming" about solutions rather than just announcing them, police were also more likely to be involved than were residents.

Follow-up reports at beat community meetings are important aspects of the process. Reports on problem-solving efforts presented at beat community meetings serve several functions. These discussions help make it clear to participants that attending "pays off," and that they should attend because something actually happens as a result of the meetings. Reports on the problem-solving efforts of residents help sustain the enthusiasm of participants for the process, as it recognizes their contributions and may encourage others to join in. Beat community meetings also provide a forum for residents to hold beat officers accountable. Calling for reports on their efforts since the previous meeting helps savvy residents ensure that police and city service agencies actually follow up on problems discussed at these sessions. The observers found that police contributed reports of their efforts fairly often, and they reported on their problem-solving activities at 74 percent of the meetings. However, only 47 percent of the meetings featured residents discussing their own efforts.

Because sustaining effective citizen participation in problem solving has proven to be difficult in many areas of the city, the observers also kept note of the role of beat community meetings in mobilizing participants. One factor they watched for was whether volunteers were called for or whether sign-up sheets were distributed at the meeting to engage participants in particular activities. They found that this happened

at 24 percent of the meetings. On the other hand, other community events or activities were announced at 60 percent of the meetings, and attendees were encouraged to use the city's non-emergency 311 services hotline at 61 percent of the meetings. Observers also made a critical summary judgment at the end of each session: Did residents leave the meeting with a commitment to future action? When participants leave knowing what needs to be done, as well as their role in those efforts, beat community meetings may have a greater impact than when there is no commitment to clear action. Observers were to assess each meeting on the basis of calls for volunteers, announcements of other meetings or activities, and action plans that were discussed. Based on these criteria, they judged that only 26 percent of the meetings met the standard of having an "action component."

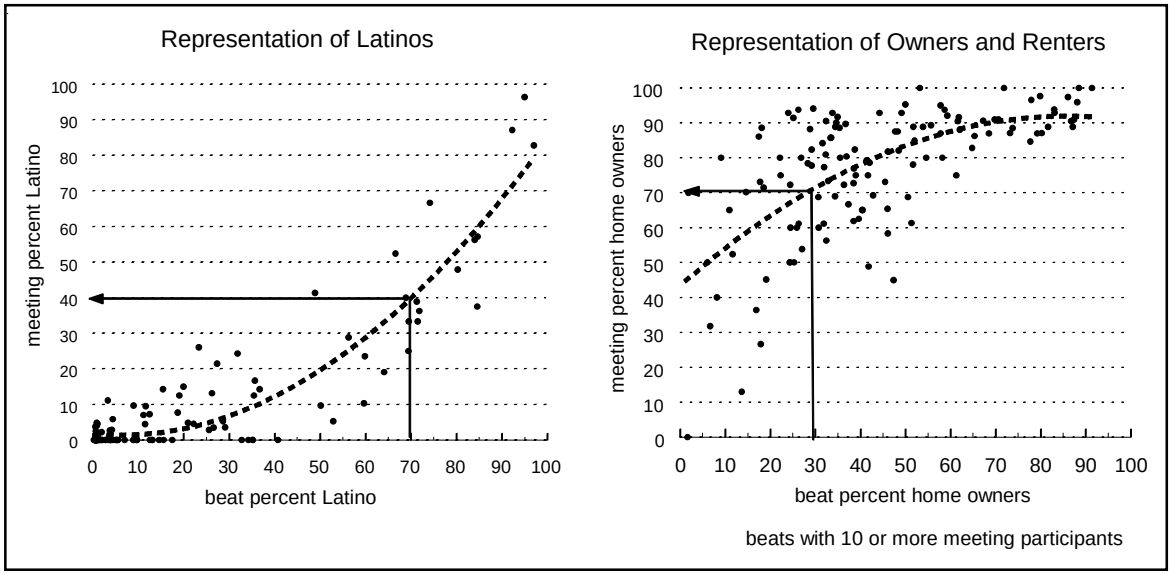
To summarize all of these factors, a model meeting index was created by summing each of the 10 components of a model meeting. The lowest score a meeting could receive was zero and the highest score was 10. When the elements of the meetings were combined, the usual meeting met a bit more than half of our criteria: the average meeting score was 6.2. Across the beats, none of the meetings received a score of zero, but 13 percent received four points or less. At the other end of the scale, 3 percent of the meetings received a perfect score, and 24 percent received a score of 8, 9, or 10.

What seemed to contribute to better meetings? One factor that has been identified in past reports remains important: civilian leadership. Based on their overall score, meetings that were chaired jointly by residents and police best fit the model, with an average rating of 7.4. They were followed by those run by residents (6.6), while those run only by police scored an average of 6.0. However, residents principally conducted only 37 percent of the meetings, and did so jointly with police only 5 percent of the time. Among the police, the most highly rated meetings were run by beat team sergeants, while officers from the Community Policing Office ran the lowest-rated meetings. Among the components of the model-meeting index, civilian- or jointly led meetings were more likely to have clear agendas and discussions of solutions to the problems discussed. They were also more likely to feature descriptions by residents about their own problem-solving activities, more calls for volunteers for various activities, and they were more likely to end with a commitment to action on the part of residents. Model meeting scores were not linked to the predominate race of a beat or to any racial disparity between residents and the police.

Representing the community

In Chicago's model, beat community meetings are the vehicle for grass-roots consultation and collaboration between police and residents. But since in many areas a "good" meeting draws about 30 residents (or an average of only about 0.4 percent of the adult population of a beat), to what extent do those who attend beat meetings represent community residents? The answer involves comparisons like those made in **Figure 5**. It describes the relationship between the demographic composition of the beats (at the bottom of each chart) and the background of those who attended meetings there (on the side of each chart).

Figure 5



Information about beat residents is based on the 2000 census. The contrasting data on beat meeting participants is drawn from questionnaires completed by 3,656 residents who attended meetings the consortium observed.

The right panel depicts the match between the percentage of beat residents and meeting participants who owned their home, an important feature of any neighborhood. As it indicates, homeowners were significantly overrepresented in the beats we observed: they were the majority group at 90 percent of the meetings. At the average meeting, 77 percent of participants were homeowners, compared to a beat average of 44 percent. The overrepresentation of homeowners is especially apparent at low levels of beat home ownership. As the arrow illustrates, in beats that averaged about 30 percent homeownership, homeowners made up about 70 percent of those attending meetings.

The left panel charts the representation of the city's Latinos. It documents that Latino participation in beat community meetings tended to be low except in beats where a large concentration of Latinos resided. From this point it rose sharply, but there are relatively few heavily Latino beats, so underrepresentation of Latinos was the norm. Even at the 70 percent Latino mark, the proportion of Latinos at beat community meetings was generally only about 40 percent, as indicated by the arrow.

Other groups were overrepresented at beat community meetings as well. One such group is older neighborhood residents. In beats where about 15 percent of the population is over age 65, almost 30 percent of those attending meetings were senior citizens.

In short, on many dimensions, involvement in Chicago's beat community meetings demonstrates an "establishment bias." This is not uncommon. In many social programs that rely on volunteers, the best-off and more established members of the community are quickest to get involved and take advantage of the effort. Research on involvement in neighborhood anti-crime organizations find that higher-income, more educated, home owning and long-term area residents more frequently know of opportunities to participate and are more likely to get involved when they have the opportunity. In the case of beat community meetings, the largest discrepancies in involvement favored homeowners, non-Latinos and older, long-term residents.

Latinos were the most underrepresented racial or ethnic group. Chicago has made efforts to involve Latinos more deeply in its community-policing effort. The publicity campaign supporting the program featured a component aimed at Spanish-speaking residents. It has included paid promotional announcements and a police-staffed talk show on Spanish-language radio; booths at festivals held in Latino neighborhoods; and wide distribution of posters, flyers and newsletters in Spanish. Spanish-speaking community organizers work for the city to generate involvement in beat community meetings and problem solving. The city's emergency communication system is staffed to handle foreign-language calls, and the police department itself has about 800 Spanish-speaking officers. The department's cadet diversity training includes some role-playing exercises revolving around linguistic issues. But despite these plans, the integration of the city's Latino residents into CAPS has proven difficult to accomplish. As we noted earlier, English-only handouts were available at 83 percent of the meetings, and only 4 percent of the meetings we attended featured even a little translation.

It is also significant that there has been little progress in improving the representativeness of Chicago's beat community meetings. The patterns of participation revealed by the 2002 beat community meeting study parallel almost exactly the findings of the consortium's 1998 study, which were presented in our November 2000 report. In 1998, beat community meetings also overrepresented homeowners, long-term residents and older Chicagoans, and dramatically underrepresented the city's growing Latino population. Especially in light of the deteriorating neighborhood conditions they report, engaging the city's Latinos in CAPS is one of the program's largest challenges.■

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