



On Good Authority

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On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice. This report was written by staff Research Analyst Karen S. Levy McCanna. It is the second in a series of four summaries highlighting the most recent program evaluation of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy. The evaluation was conducted by the Chicago Community Policing Consortium, coordinated by the Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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Citizen awareness, local involvement fuel community policing program

Citizen involvement is a central theme of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), a community policing program implemented throughout the city. This *On Good Authority* illustrates factors contributing to public awareness and involvement in Chicago's community policing initiative. Northwestern University evaluators used survey data collected from Chicago residents to measure levels of awareness during 1996, 1997, and 1998. The evaluation and full report were supported by federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds distributed through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Citizen awareness

Survey responses indicated that awareness of CAPS has steadily increased since 1996. Demographic categories of participants surveyed included race, language, age, property ownership, income, education, and gender. The survey revealed that participants between the ages of 18 and 29 years experienced the highest awareness increase in percentage points from 1996 to 1998 (30 percent). An increase in awareness of 20 percentage points or more was seen in many categories. Overall, 53 percent of surveyed Chicago residents were aware of the CAPS program in 1996, 68 percent in 1997, and 79 percent in 1998.

In 1998, the most dramatic differences in awareness were linked to language and formal education. The survey was conducted in Spanish and

English. Sixty-five percent of respondents who preferred to be interviewed in Spanish were aware of CAPS, while 80 percent of respondents who were interviewed in English were aware of the program. About 60 percent of respondents ages 18 years and older who had not completed high school were aware of CAPS.

The survey showed 78 percent of whites, 84 percent of blacks, and 73 percent of Latinos had knowledge of CAPS. Also, more homeowners (83 percent) than renters (75 percent) were aware of the program. In addition, 84 percent of those grouped in the moderate income category and 69 percent of those in the low income category had knowledge of CAPS. Finally, 87 percent of males surveyed and 76 percent of females surveyed were aware of the program.

Citizens were asked if they were aware of efforts to conduct community meetings addressing crime in their neighborhoods. Overall, 61 percent of Chicagoans surveyed reported knowing that community alternative policing strategy meetings were being held. Homeowners (70 percent), residents who had lived in their neighborhoods for more than five years (79 percent), and households with incomes of more than \$60,000 annually (87 percent) were most likely to report awareness of community meetings between 1996 and 1998. About 50 percent of young adults, 55 percent of non-high school graduates, and 50 percent of residents whose primary language was Spanish reported

knowledge of community meetings in their area.

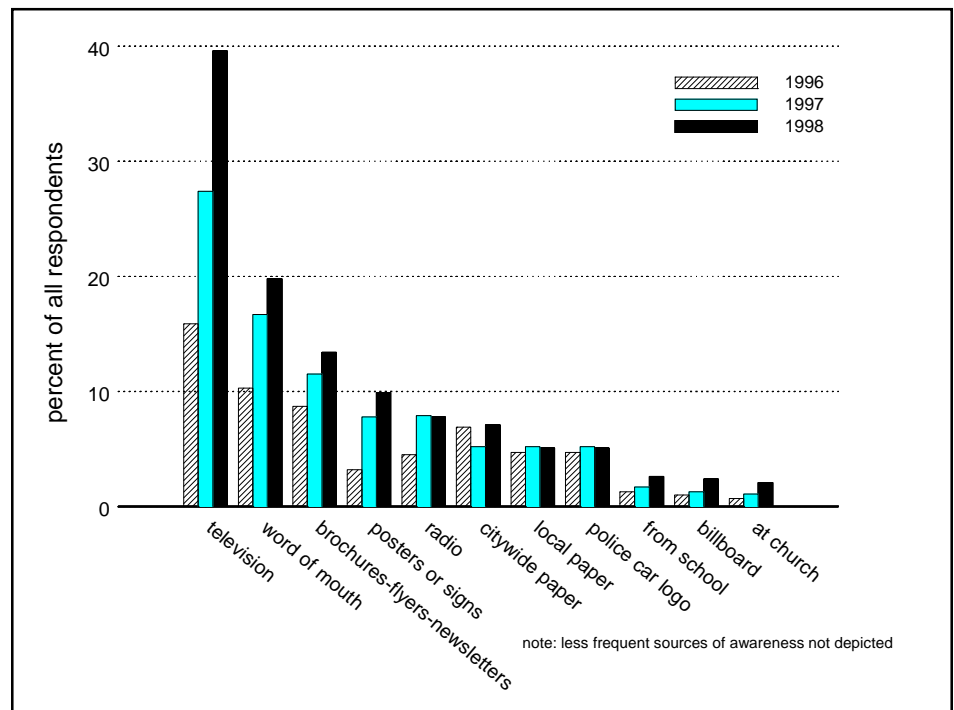
Promotional efforts

The increase in awareness may be due to a mass media campaign launched by the CAPS Implementation Office in 1997. CAPS information was featured in radio and television spots, and local newspaper ads. CAPS promotions also were present on city buses, and on posters and billboards at rapid transit stops and other high-traffic areas. In addition, promotional materials were distributed during Chicago-area events. Also, printed materials were distributed through targeted mass mailings, area business organizations, libraries, churches, and schools. Some handouts and radio, television, and local newspaper advertisements were presented in Spanish and English.

A workshop promoting awareness was presented to community activists at Whitney Young High School in 1998. Seminars were given on court advocacy and running effective beat meetings. Similar workshops also were offered during a block club convention attended by citizens of 750 neighborhoods.

Survey respondents were asked to identify the way in which they learned of CAPS. Interviewers recorded up to five sources. Nearly 60 percent identified one source of CAPS awareness, while 14 percent identified three or more. Evaluators determined that public awareness of CAPS occurred in different ways. A higher percentage of respondents with a lower level of education learned of CAPS through personal communication, while a higher percentage of respondents with higher levels of education learned about CAPS by reading a newspaper. One quarter of white respondents, 10 percent of blacks, and 8 percent of Latinos stated they became aware of the program through a newspaper. Younger people identified television more often as their source of information, while older people said they learned about the program while talking with others. The greatest awareness of CAPS came from television promotions or a local cable show (63 percent) (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Sources of CAPS awareness



Community meeting attendance

Beat meetings provide a forum conducive to open communication. Police meet with other community members to discuss crime that exists in their neighborhoods and collaborate to form prevention strategies. Evaluators collected data regarding attendance rates and discussion topics from reports filed by officers who attended the meetings.

About 250,000 Chicagoans attended beat community meetings between 1995 and 1998. The number of attendees increased annually: 59,200 in 1995; 62,120 in 1996; 65,300 in 1997; and 69,700 in 1998. Figure 2 illustrates monthly and cumulative attendance patterns.

Attendance patterns

Data collected address attendance patterns of community members by police beats within police districts. A citywide survey taken in spring 1998 showed that 14 percent of respondents had participated in at least one meeting in the prior year. The average participant attended about two meetings per year.

Attendance rates were compared with demographic information, crime statistics, and other data in each beat. Beat meeting attendance was higher in districts that were predominantly African American, showed lower income and education levels, and had higher crime rates. Attendance also was higher in areas with higher infant mortality rates.

In questionnaires distributed during beat meetings in 1998, participants were asked how they became aware of the meetings. The majority of participants (46 percent) reported they learned of the meetings from a neighbor. Brochures and flyers were cited by 37 percent of those surveyed. Others indicated they learned of the meetings during personal conversations (22 percent) and while reading local newspapers (13 percent).

The citywide survey was designed to determine what types of individuals attended beat meetings. The survey revealed that marketing and civic engagement sustained community participation in the meetings. Evaluators identified a distinct difference between how people learned about CAPS and whether they attended meetings. About 30 percent of respondents who learned of CAPS from

television reported attending a beat meeting. A higher percentage of respondents who learned about CAPS through personal conversation reported attending a beat meeting (41 percent).

Residents who were more involved in community affairs typically were more likely to know about CAPS and be aware of, and attend, beat meetings. The survey asked whether household members were involved in a neighborhood watch group, local school council, church or synagogue, or community organization. More than 35 percent reported affiliation with one of the groups.

Beat meeting leadership

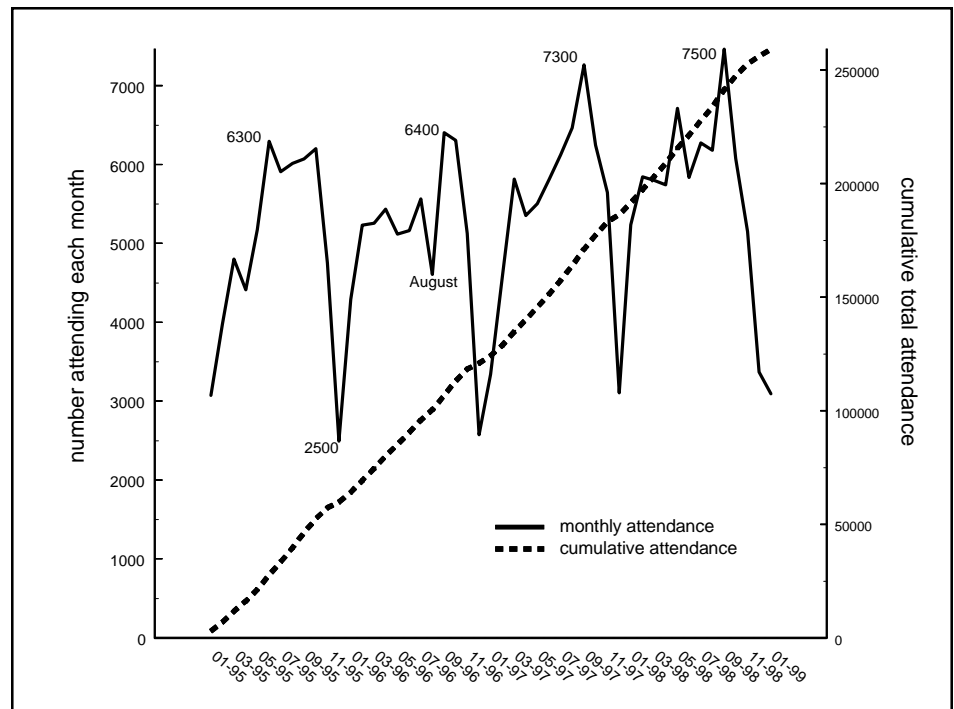
The Chicago Police Department provided training sessions for civilian beat leaders, beat officers, and sergeants on how to conduct effective beat meetings in March and April 1998. Evaluators attended beat meetings between April and December 1998 to measure effectiveness of police and civilian leadership. They attended 459 meetings in 256 police beats.

On average, 25 residents and seven police officers were present at observed meetings. Four or more officers were present at more than 95 percent of the meetings observed. Beat meetings were often held on the same night of the month and in the same location.

Both police and citizens were expected to take responsibility for problem-solving initiatives, and beat meetings provided a venue to review and assess the effectiveness of their strategies.

Evaluators recorded the mechanics of each meeting, such as the presence of agendas, crime maps, crime reports, and civilian facilitators. Written or oral agendas were provided at 65 percent of the observed meetings. Minutes or summaries of past meetings were provided at 12 percent of the meetings. Crime maps or crime reports were present at 70 percent of the meetings. Sixty-seven percent of meetings met the Chicago Police Department requirement that civilian facilitators were present. Observers judged 73 percent of police facilitators to be

Figure 2
Beat meeting attendance



“fairly effective” or “very effective.” More than 60 percent of civilian facilitators were rated “fairly effective” or “very effective.” Overall, 15 percent of meetings were given ratings of “very effectively managed” and almost 60 percent of meetings were given ratings of “effectively managed.” Officers who played leadership roles were judged slightly more effective than civilian facilitators.

The majority of meetings focused on neighborhood problems, and included discussions on how to solve them. Police proposed solutions 45 percent of the time while residents proposed solutions 14 percent of the time. Joint proposals were observed 16 percent of the time. Follow-up reports on problem-solving activities provided recognition for residents’ efforts and reinforced participation. At 61 percent of observed meetings, police presented follow-up reports. Residents presented follow-up reports during 35 percent of the meetings.

Evaluating CAPS meetings

Evaluators created a “model meeting index” by summing the frequency of

important components of the meeting and setting standards. The average meeting scored 5.6 out of 10 on the index and the median score was a 6. Scores ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 10. Overall, the average meeting met a little more than half of the criteria and met the standard of “very effective.”

Civilian leadership was the most predominant factor in each meeting’s effectiveness. Meetings chaired by civilians or civilians and police personnel received an average index rating of 6.3. Meetings led by civilians or jointly were more likely to have clear agendas, include calls for volunteers, conclude with an action component and feature follow-up problem-solving reports.

Another factor identified in higher rated meetings was a regular yearly pattern of high attendance. Total yearly attendance in the higher-rated meetings was 77 percent higher than the lower-rated meetings. Meetings that included aldermanic staff, community organizers, and city agencies received higher ratings.

CAPS activists

Telephone interviews were conducted with 659 CAPS activists in fall 1998.

Respondents included district advisory committee members, subcommittee chairpersons, beat facilitators, and independent activists. Almost 95 percent of targeted CAPS participants completed surveys.

Activists were confident about CAPS — more than half reported they thought police were doing a “good job” or “very good job” at various aspects of the program. Activists were optimistic about fostering resident involvement, beat meeting effectiveness, district advisory committees, and commanders’ cooperation with neighborhood organizations. The most frequent concern expressed by activists was with regard to beat meeting attendance.

Views of police

To determine officers’ perceptions of CAPS, questionnaires were distributed to officers who attended beat meetings. Substantial data were collected from 1,030 officers. Nearly 70 percent of officers reported attending all beat

meetings, 17 percent reported attending every other meeting and less than 15 percent reported attending less than half of the meetings conducted. About 60 percent of officers reported their responsibilities at beat community meetings include making a presentation, giving a report, describing crime statistics, or providing information. Almost 70 percent of the officers indicated they were present to answer questions, 25 percent attended meetings to complete CAPS service request forms, and 15 percent were in attendance to chair or co-chair the meeting. Nearly 20 of the officers were sergeants who were present to supervise.

The questionnaires also asked officers how satisfied they were with meeting attendance and their relationship with residents who attended the meet-

ings. About a third of the officers surveyed reported being “very satisfied,” and 43 percent were “somewhat satisfied.” Officers who reported regular attendance at beat meetings were more satisfied with meeting attendance. More than 50 percent of officers indicated their relationship with community residents attending beat meetings was “very congenial,” and 42 percent indicated their relationship was “somewhat congenial.”

Conclusion

Citizen involvement continues to fuel Chicago’s community policing initiative. Awareness has increased along with beat community meeting attendance. Most residents attending beat meetings reported that meetings were productive and led to constructive action. ♦

