

Chapter 31

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Standards in this chapter relate to the establishment and maintenance of a community relations functions.

To operate effectively, police departments must have the support of their communities. Departments can obtain such support by informing the public and news media of events that affect the lives of citizens in the community. In short, the department's policy should be one of openness and candour.

To convey information, departments often rely on the news media. Policies should be developed that govern what information should be released, when it should be released, and by whom it should be released. In large jurisdictions where media contacts are frequent and often of a sensitive nature, a full-time public information officer may be needed to coordinate activities; where the community served is small and media contacts infrequent, the assignment of the function to an individual as a part-time responsibility may suffice.

31.1 Public Information

31.1.1 A written directive establishes a public information function, to include:

- o assisting news personnel in covering routine news stories, and at the scenes of incidents;
- o being available for on-call responses to the news media;
- o preparing and distributing department news releases; and
- o arranging for, and assisting at, news conferences.

*Comments: The written directive should address how the department will handle potential situations in which the news media are interested in department operations, as well as situations in which the department wishes to generate media interest.
(M M M)*

31.1.2 A written directive establishes the procedures for press releases.

Comments: The department should have procedures that address the criteria to be used in determining (1) the need for press releases on a daily or weekly basis, or as necessitated by specific occurrences in the department's service area and (2) the content and the extent of coverage of department activities.

Press releases may be issued in bulletin form or through tape-recorded messages. (M M M)

31.1.3 A written directive identifies—by name or position held—those within the department who may release information to the news media.

Comments: Situations may arise when events require an immediate spokesperson. (M M M)

31.1.4 A written directive governs the access of news media representatives within the perimeter of crime scenes.

Comments: News media representatives should not be in a position to interfere with police operations at the scene of an incident. The guidelines for news media access, including access by photographers, to the scene should be communicated to the media to help ensure their cooperation. (M M M)

31.1.5 A written directive specifies the information held by the department regarding ongoing criminal investigations that may be released to the news media.

Comments: The intent of the standard is that the department provide specific guidance to personnel regarding the release of information. (M M M)

31.2 Community Relations

31.2.1 A written directive establishes a community relations function within the department.

Comments: Police departments should establish direct contacts with the community served. Without "grass root" community support, successful enforcement of traffic, vice, and other laws may be difficult if not impossible. A well-organized community relations operation can be an effective means of eliciting public support and can serve to identify problems in the making. (M M M)

31.2.2 A survey of citizen attitudes and opinions is conducted every three to five years with respect to:

- o overall department performance;**
- o overall competence of department employees;**
- o officers' attitudes and behaviour toward citizens;**
- o concern over safety and security within the department's service area as a whole;**

- o **concern over safety and security within the beat where the respondent lives; and**
- o **recommendations and suggestions for improvements.**

Comments: The use of surveys is widespread in both the public and private sector. Police departments should use citizen attitude surveys to complement other sources of information used in the decision-making process. The survey should use established research practices, such as random sampling of at least 1 percent of the population and sampling within each motorized patrol beat in proportion to the ratio of population within the beat to total population in the jurisdiction. The survey may be conducted by mail, in person, or by telephone and may be combined with questions relating to victimization and other issues. The results of the survey should be provided to the community. (M M M)