

CHICAGO POLICE
DEPARTMENT MEMBER
PERSPECTIVES ON
COMMUNITY POLICING:
**SYNTHESIS OF
INTERVIEWS OF
CHICAGO POLICE
DEPARTMENT MEMBERS**

APRIL 2025



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Introduction

In January 2024, Chicago Police Department (CPD) Superintendent Larry Snelling reiterated his goal for every CPD officer to be a community policing officer¹. As part of the effort to operationalize this vision Department-wide, Civic Consulting Alliance (CCA) conducted interviews with CPD members across the Department to understand their perspectives and inform future work.

This document provides a synthesis of those interviews, and is divided into three sections:

1. Methods

- Interviewees
- Interview questions

2. Key themes

- Strengths
 - Most members are receptive to, and appreciate the value of, community policing as a Department-wide way of work
 - Many members feel that best practices for community policing exist within Department already, they are just not consistently defined or applied
- Challenges
 - Many members emphasized staffing challenges and lack of beat integrity as impediments to achieving the Superintendent's vision
 - Members frequently noted the importance of staff wellness and soft skills (e.g. communication)
 - Members seem to fear doing something wrong, yet feel pressure that the public expects them to do everything
 - Members expressed a disconnect with (CPD) headquarters, a need for buy-in and direction from leadership at the district level, and a desire for positive reinforcement/recognition

3. Detailed interview findings: three core challenges surfaced in the interviews

- Definition of Community Policing: What is community policing?
- Roles of Community Policing: How should community policing be implemented across roles?
- System Confidence: What must be true for the Department to fully execute the vision that every officer is a community policing officer?
 - Staffing and geographic integrity
 - Time
 - Morale
 - Accountability and support
 - Recruitment, training, and education
 - Community participation

¹ <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ccpsa/GOALS/2024%20CPD%20Goals%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

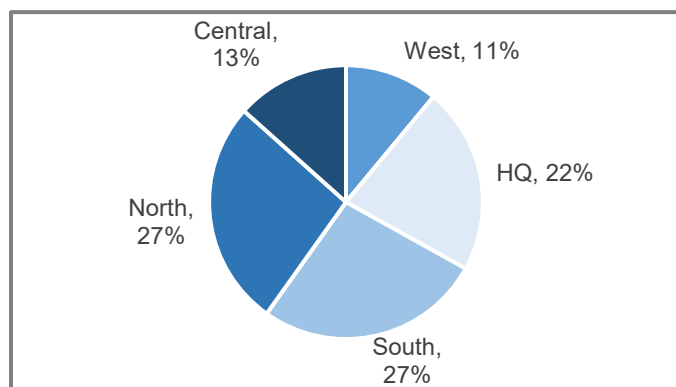
Section 1: Methods

Interviewees

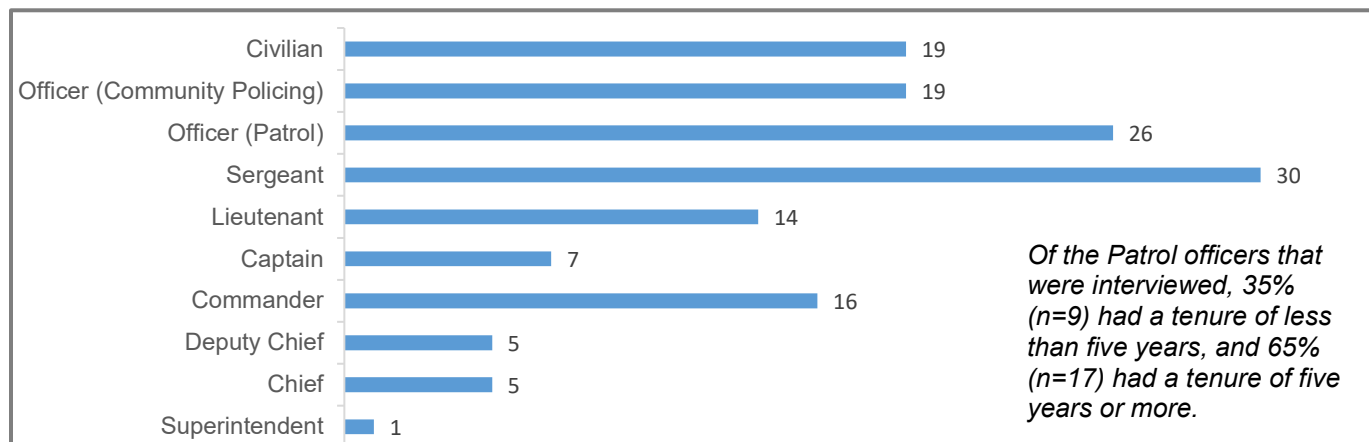
CCA conducted interviews and focus groups with 123 sworn members representing all ranks and 19 civilians across 15 districts to capture CPD perspectives.

Commanders, Lieutenants, Sergeants, and Officers (grouped by tenure at CPD: greater than 5 years, less than 5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 Northside districts (014, 019, 024, 025) - 4 Central districts (001, 008, 012, 018) - 3 Westside districts (010, 011, 015) - 4 Southside districts (004, 006, 007, 022)
Specialized community policing roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Civilian</i>: Area Coordinators, Youth Service Coordinators, Community Organizers - <i>Sworn</i>: CAPS Sergeants, CAPS Officers, Liaisons (Youth, Unhoused, Immigrants, LGBTQIA+), District Coordination Sergeants and District Coordination Officers (Neighborhood Policing Initiative)
Headquarters leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chief of Counterterrorism, Internal Affairs, Detectives, Patrol, Constitutional Policing and Reform - <i>Additional personnel</i>: Office of Community Policing, Academy, Research and Development, Recruitment and Retention

Interviewees by Geography



Interviewees by Rank



Interview questions

Questions aimed to understand current perceptions of community policing and operational implications of the Superintendent's vision for community policing.

Current State Assessment

- How would you explain community policing at CPD right now?
- What works about the way that CPD approaches community policing right now?
- Where do you see opportunities for improvement in the way that CPD approaches community policing?
- Do you know what the CAPS² members / NPI³ members (DCOs) do?
 - o How do you work with CAPS / NPI?

Future State Vision

- Are you aware of the Superintendent's vision for community policing?
 - o *Vision: "Every officer is a community policing officer."*
- What does "every officer" mean to you?
 - o Who is included?
 - o Who is not included?
- What do you like about this vision? What do you think could be challenging about implementing this vision at CPD?
- What is the ideal experience for Chicago residents during their interactions with CPD members?
- What do you think are the operational implications of this vision for community policing? In other words, what would this vision look like in practice compared to what is currently expected

² The [Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy \(CAPS\)](#) is a Department-wide community policing strategy that began in 1993 and is staffed by both sworn and civilian members.

³ The [Neighborhood Policing Initiative \(NPI\)](#) is a community policing program that began in 2019 as a pilot (currently in 10 districts) and is staffed by sworn District Coordination Sergeants and District Coordination Officers (DCOs).

Section 2: Key themes

Members expressed strengths of and challenges with operationalizing community policing Department-wide (across the current and future state).

Strengths

Most members are receptive to, and appreciate the value of, community policing as a Department-wide way of work

- *“Community policing starts with every officer, not just a unit”* – Commander
- *“The cases you solve are because the community comes forward...the best info you get is from the street”* – Patrol Officer
- *“I can’t think of why anyone would say no to the vision”* – Patrol Officer
- *“I’ll keep it in the back of my mind: “What would a community policing officer do?”*
– Patrol Officer

Many members feel that best practices for community policing exist within Department already, they are just not consistently defined or applied

- *“Officers are doing community policing everyday – we don’t call it that, but we are”*
– Patrol Sergeant
- *After my calls, I ask “Did I solve the problem?” I can’t leave until I tell myself “yes” or “a little”* – Patrol Officer
- *“Great opportunities for engagement are to stop and ask people if they need help getting a tire changed or cables jumped, helping an old lady pulling her garbage can”*
– Patrol Supervisor
- *“I show new officers where museums and street vendors are instead of only focusing on which gangs are where”* – Patrol Officer
- *“Take time to connect with [domestic violence] DV victims”* – Patrol Supervisor

Challenges

Many members emphasized staffing challenges and lack of beat integrity as impediments to achieving the Superintendent's vision

- *"Community members would like to see more of the same officers"* – Patrol Officer
- *"If you build up beat integrity and problem solving, less people will hate us because they get to know us"* – Patrol Officer
- *"Manpower is so bad that officers can't even sit with victims of burglaries to give crime prevention advice because we're getting banged by the dispatcher"* – Patrol Supervisor
- *"It's just chasing the radio all day long. The days of proactive policing are gone"* – Patrol Supervisor
- *"The biggest complaint is 'why are the police taking so long'"* – Patrol Supervisor

Members frequently noted the importance of staff wellness and soft skills (e.g. communication)

- *"Community policing is about using soft skills, not enforcer skills"* – Patrol Officer
- *"We use our own time and money to make our quiet rooms comfortable"* – Patrol Supervisor
- *"In calls, we mostly listen to people and give resources for five minutes. People tend to open up [if we do that] vs. if we come in hot"* – Patrol Officer

Members seem to fear doing something wrong, yet feel pressure that the public expects them to do everything

- *"Confused on how to conduct basic traffic stops / chases. How do I approach situations without getting in trouble for doing what police are supposed to do?"* – Patrol Officer
- *"People see us as the answer to everything instead of calling 311"* – Patrol Officer
- *"People expect the police to do everything for them; mow their lawn, be a security guard, etc."* – Patrol Officer

Members expressed a disconnect with (CPD) headquarters, a need for buy-in and direction from leadership at the district level, and a desire for positive reinforcement/recognition

- *"You don't get promoted based on people skills."* – Patrol Officer
- *"We don't get enough recognition when we do good. We need to feel uplifted."* – Patrol Officer
- *"Some lieutenants and supervisors are petrified to go out in the community, we have to lead the pack"* – Patrol Supervisor
- *"Sergeants/lieutenants can do a better job saying 'good job' or 'you make me look great' "* – Patrol Supervisor

Section 3: Interview findings

Interviews surfaced three core challenges:

1. **Definition of community policing:** What is community policing?
2. **Roles of community policing:** How should community policing be implemented across roles?
3. **System confidence:** What must be true for the Department to fully execute the vision that every officer is a community policing officer?

Definition: What is community policing?

There was not a consistent definition of community policing from members across interviews.

Members described community policing as:	
About demonstrating respect and professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- "It's about treating people like humans" – OCP- "My goal for my officers is to try and make someone's day better" – Commander- "[It's] common decency, treating people with respect and professionalism" – Area Deputy Chief- "My respect for people doesn't change when I arrest them. I don't always need to have the last word. Then, the respect is often reciprocated" – Patrol Officer- "The best way to be of service is often very simple. What people remember most are those quiet, often unnoticed acts of kindness" – Commander- "Our job is all about customer service" – Patrol Lieutenant
Solving problems that residents are facing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- "Community policing is having a hand in the community as far as public safety goes...We become the central problem solvers for our entire district" – Community Organizer- "You are there to serve the public. If you don't have the answer, find the answer so that people walk away satisfied" – Commander- "We get problems from senior citizens to potholes, and we have to figure out how to solve residents' problems without passing the buck on top of taking in problems related to law enforcement and crime" – CAPS Officer
Planning events and engagements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- "Beat officers can't put together community engagements – they don't have the time to plan senior bingo or a trip to the Sox" – Area Deputy Chief- [Community policing personnel] are seen as party planners – Chief- "Community policing [currently] doesn't have much to do with policing, it's more events" – Supervisor- "We have to show up at all the events that community organizers put on because no one else from CPD will" – CAPS Officer- "Community members see right through party planning" – Sergeant

Role: How should community policing be implemented across roles?

The tables below synthesize how members see community policing being implemented in their roles.

Role	Key themes and illustrative quotes
Patrol Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Connecting to resources</i>: "I accidentally stumbled into a domestic violence shelter and have been handing out their business cards to victims ever since" – Officer - <i>Building relationships</i>: "We have to change the belief that every time we show up somewhere it's because something bad happened" – Officer - <i>Problem solving</i>: "It's about solving major crimes" – Officer - <i>Follow through</i>: "I did your report a week ago and just wanted to make sure you're OK" – Officer - <i>Respect, professionalism</i>: "Talk like a person, be a human being, that's how I would want to be treated" – Officer - <i>Customer service</i>: "I use my prior restaurant customer service all the time. I view people as customers. Can't be on this job without people skills." – Officer - <i>Communication skills</i>: "More human, less robot" – Officer
Field Training Officers (FTOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Problem solving</i>: Demonstrate ways that community policing can help solve problems and how officers apply it in practice - <i>Follow through</i>: "We always did some kind of community policing with our FTOs. We would follow up on calls the next day after we responded." – Patrol Officer - <i>Training</i>: Immersion program in District Community Policing Offices for new recruits after they begin the FTO cycle or new officers interested in continuing education; mentorship program for recruits and officers with < 5 years of experience to shadow officers with exceptional community policing skills
Patrol Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Model key behaviors</i>: "If it is prioritized by Lieutenants and Supervisors to try and make someone's day better, it will translate to officers" – Commander - <i>Model knowledge of community resources</i>: "Mental health and Domestic Violence services change district to district. It's on Commanders, Captains, and Lieutenants to make sure officers know who offers what. Here's what the City offers through city services." – Commander - <i>Model procedural justice internally</i>: "If you don't speak to your co-workers, you're sure as hell not talking to the community" – Patrol Sergeant
Front Desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Connecting to resources</i>: "I told my front desk, that was not a community policing problem, you can help with that" – CAPS Officer - <i>Customer service mindset</i>: Friendly to the public - <i>Problem solving</i>: Take responsibility for issues that can be addressed or referred immediately - <i>Follow through</i>: Track and follow-up on referrals

Role	Key themes and illustrative quotes
HQ Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Model relationship building internally</i>: “Have [senior leadership from] headquarters come down to districts during roll calls and thank officers that they ask to go out every day. Especially on midnights.” – Commander - <i>Model respect, key behaviors</i>: “Need respect from top down” – Supervisor - <i>Provide flexibility</i>: “No more cookie cutter approach from headquarters. Every district is unique.”
Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Communication skills</i>: “In the Academy, we used to have people skills class” – Sergeant
Detectives and Family Liaison Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Problem solving, connection to resources</i>: “Detectives often identify an issue and offer wraparound services” – Sergeant - <i>Connection to resources</i>: “Better job getting out to outreach; how to better protect from financial crimes, for example, to victimized groups” – Commander - <i>Relationship building</i>: “Connecting with community members may be inherently hard due to the nature of investigation” – Chief

The tables below synthesize how general CPD members (District/Area Patrol) vs. dedicated community policing members (District CAPS personnel and District NPI personnel) perceive / understand the Office of Community Policing (OCP) and the role of specialized community policing programs (CAPS and NPI).

General CPD Perceptions <i>Bureau of Patrol</i>	
Titles: Area Chiefs, Commanders, Lieutenants, Sergeants, and Officers Districts: 001, 004, 006, 007, 008, 010, 011, 012, 014, 015, 018, 019, 022, 024, 025	
<i>“CAPS ‘helps’ and is proactive. Patrol is more reactive.” – Sergeant</i>	
Culture described	Members expressed conflicting responses based on their experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some were not sure what District Community Policing Office does; others rely on District Community Policing Office heavily - Some see District Community Policing Office as an easy job; others see District Community Policing Office as overburdened - NPI/DCOs have not been scaled to all districts, therefore many officers had never heard of NPI. Others wondered if it needed to be separate from CAPS within the District Community Policing Office.
Behavior described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patrol, especially new officers, are entirely unaware of or don’t know how to use District Community Policing Office resources in the field - Patrol relies on District Community Policing Office to be the “Officer Friendly” that they cannot be or host events that they don’t have time to attend - Some Patrol members do not bother their District Community Policing Office because they see them as stretched too thin and, instead, take community policing work (follow-ups or providing resources) into their own hands (e.g. acting as de-facto Domestic Violence Liaisons outside of CAPS offices)
Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of investment in, or will to do, community policing work because it is seen as another offices’ responsibility - Most members assume that CAPS = community policing (minimal awareness of NPI or broader concepts of community policing)

Dedicated Community Policing Staff Perceptions <i>District Community Policing Office / CAPS Members</i>	
Titles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>HQ-level:</i> Area Coordinators, Youth Coordinators, Community Organizers, Liaisons (Youth, Unhoused, Immigrants, LGBTQIA+) • <i>District-level:</i> CAPS Sergeants, CAPS Officers, various Liaisons (e.g. Faith-Based, Older Adults, etc.) Districts: 006, 007, 012, 014, 015, 024, 025	
<p><i>“Officers think we do all the fun stuff, but we do all the relationship building and lot of paperwork. Everyone still has a designated job on top of engagement.” – CAPS Sworn Staff</i></p> <p><i>“Officers only build relationships with affinity officers in districts when something bad happens there. They’re not proactive in preventing emergencies, community policing is the solution.” – CAPS Sworn Staff</i></p>	
Culture described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel like they do everything - Lack of direction and resources
Behavior described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A lot gets “dumped” on District Community Policing Office from Patrol officers and headquarters (e.g., desk personnel refer calls to District Community Policing Office that could be handled by the desk) - Expected to plan/host events (“logistics support for HQ in the field”), act as Affinity Officers and Liaisons, write district strategic plans, and maintain relationships with community all while being pulled to Patrol - Feel that people don’t want to join District Community Policing Office because it’s too much work - No formal training to be a part of District Community Policing Office; learning on the job as you go - Little guidance from headquarters on what they are supposed to be doing; directions seem unrelated and lack a cohesive strategy - No time or money to plan events - Short-staffed; many District Community Policing Office sworn staff are doing double-duty covering multiple Liaison roles at once or working both District Community Policing Office and Patrol - Civilians in particular feel overworked and underappreciated (headquarters and sworn officers)
Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings of burnout - Because of staff shortages and frequent transfers, civilians often hold the greatest community-related institutional knowledge; however, they are not always respected by sworn members and community often wants to interact with sworn members - Constant, intensive cycle of engagements but unsure of their direct impacts

Dedicated Community Policing Staff Perceptions NPI Members	
Titles: District Coordination Sergeants, District Coordination Officers (DCOs) Districts: 004, 006, 010, 011, 025	
<p><i>“DCOs think outside the box to do things that police wouldn't normally do. There's a different expectation of DCOs than beat officers. Beat officers would never approach aldermen and business owners to that level.” – DCO</i></p> <p><i>“We’re not given the same legitimacy. We’ve recovered evidence for major criminal cases because the community is willing to give us information, but we don't get the credit.” – DCO</i></p> <p><i>“DCOs are their own business liaisons. We do things like clean up a storefront with criminal activity.” – DCO</i></p> <p><i>“I engage vendors at block parties and ask what kinds of resources they offer, what times they're open, if they're free, etc. I added them to my collection.” – DCO</i></p>	
Culture described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See themselves as the <i>real</i> community policing officers - DCOs go to community (proactive role); place-based - Community comes to CAPS / District Community Policing Office (reactive role); people-based
Behavior described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have time dedicated to problem solving, not pulled to calls for service (though may respond if they hear something relevant on the radio) - Very intentional about setting themselves apart from CAPS/District Community Policing Office; feel more respected by peers than CAPS
Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel fulfilled in their roles - Perceive role as closest example of “community police work”

System confidence: What must be true for the Department to fully execute the vision that every officer is a community policing officer?

Department members surfaced several challenges that they believe limit CPD's ability to comprehensively implement community policing as well as potential solutions. Challenges have been grouped into six categories that must be addressed so that members can fully implement desired behaviors.

Illustrative Quotations	Suggestions Provided in Interviews
Challenge: Staffing and Geographic Integrity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "We used to have 3 person cars, so there was reassurance that you would see someone you know on your beat" – Chief - "There was no one on my beat I didn't know. It made my job easier" – Patrol Officer - "[When there was beat integrity] you knew all the main players in the area. That's how you survived." – Patrol Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritize consistency of staff by geography (e.g. sector integrity); attempt longevity in geographic assignment - Minimize re-assignment (details, citywide teams, etc.) - Facilitate handover of problem solving across watches - Fully implement Unity of Command (UOC) and Span of Control (SOC)
Challenge: Time	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Too much paperwork that goes nowhere" – DCO - "People already hate me by the time I arrive because I'm 3 hours late" – Patrol Officer - "People are very appreciative when we get a chance to follow up" – Patrol Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce time reporting and administrative duties (e.g. Record Management System (RMS), shorten forms, etc.) - Reduce the number of calls for service that require police response (e.g. alternate response) - Articulate the ways that community policing can be embedded while responding to calls for service
Challenge: Morale	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "You don't want to do your job anymore [because] you don't want to get in trouble" – Patrol Officer - "You can try to create a culture of community policing, but you need people who invest and buy in" – Patrol Sergeant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that staff have access to wellness resources - Consider awards and other incentives for good work in community policing - Model caring behavior from leadership (e.g. provide notice for canceled days off) - Treat one another with respect internally - Counteract fears of doing something wrong

Challenge: Accountability and Support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “They set us up for failure; Meetings get canceled often” – CAPS Officer - “Give us the proper tools to be community policing officers and not just new reports to fill out” – Patrol Officer - “Back in the day, we’d make sure senior, building, or Domestic Violence Liaisons were put in contact with folks to follow-up but just doesn’t happen anymore.” – Patrol Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement effective measurement and accountability (performance evaluations, CompStat) - Provide access to resources and tools to support (e.g. 311 app on phones) - Develop effective mechanism to track problem solving, integrate with district strategic plans (Community Engagement Management System (CEMS) or other)
Challenge: Recruitment, Training, and Education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “DCO training should be widespread” – Commander - “Training should be there on mindset ‘of CAPS’, how to help people, how you speak to people should be our professionalism anyhow; Do follow up.” – Commander - “We are great listeners, we deal internally and externally with all levels of people, but we’ve never been trained! Yet CPD has so many trainings! Our duties are not clearly outlined” – CAPS Civilian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instill procedural justice as the foundation and model behavioral examples both internally and in the field - Ensure recruitment of high-quality new members - Make DCO problem-solving and community training required for all officers - Make Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) mandatory in the Academy - Develop cultural competency training to help staff better understand and effectively engage with diverse populations - Provide regular trainings for all staff to reinforce community policing principles
Challenge: Community Participation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The people showing up to beat meetings aren’t the people that we need to interact with” – Patrol Officer - “The community doesn’t like or respect us, and there’s no consequences for how they treat us” – Patrol Officer - “If citizens don’t get the results they want, they complain, it’s demoralizing” – Patrol Officer - “Community takes part in [the future state of community policing] too, it goes both ways” – Patrol Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase officer participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Beat meetings o Community engagements (block parties, festivals, etc.) - Increase community participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o District Advisory Committees (DAC) o Community Policing Advisory Panel (CPAP) o District Councils