Community Policing and Community Engagement in Boston

The Boston Police Department’s model of community policing prioritizes extensive community engagement to build trust, connecting youth and families in need to services and supports, with an emphasis on de-escalation and restraint by officers whenever possible. These efforts are in line with multiple Pillars of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

Under the leadership of Mayor Martin Walsh and Commissioner William Evans, the Boston Police Department has significantly expanded community engagement, outreach and intervention while improving training for new recruits as well as veteran officers. They understand that prioritizing relationships with youth and the community is the key to solidifying trust in Boston neighborhoods. This starts with positive interactions on the streets and in school classrooms; includes proactive prevention and diversion for at-risk youth and their families; and provides pathways away from violence for those who are ready to make a change.

The BPD has strong partnerships and collaborations with many other agencies, non-profits, and community-based programs. From the vast array of year-round district activities with youth to the support for families of homicide victims and victims of domestic violence; from the home visits and referrals of at-risk youth to social workers to the youth dialogues with community partners; from Coffee with a Cop to flashlight walks with residents; from Shop with a Cop to the Academy training officers to better interact with youth; and from reentry programs for returning offenders to school safety days with special needs populations; the BPD is working every day to build and strengthen relationships with the community.

Mayor Walsh and Commissioner Evans promote a culture of accountability and transparency as a means to further enhance community trust. Examples of this include the swift release of video to faith-based and community leaders following two separate fatal shootings of suspects by police in 2015, and a low key/no show of force approach to dealing with Black Lives Matter protesters that resulted in peaceful demonstrations. Commissioner Evans is strongly committed to justice and equality, issuing a Bias-Free Policing Policy in July, and creating a Social Justice Task Force comprised of community leaders and advocates to advise him on ways to improve the Department and strengthen community trust.

Examples of BPD best practices in community engagement, outreach and intervention, youth programs and training follow.

Community Engagement

Community Service Offices: Each of the 11 police districts run community outreach and youth activities through their Community Service Offices. The activities include various annual events such as Halloween and Christmas parties, a Senior Citizens Ball, and Thanksgiving turkey giveaways, as well as sports leagues, arts programs, youth/police dialogues, community service projects and block parties. Each district also runs a Junior Police Academy during the summer and participates in neighborhood flashlight walks, Coffee with a Cop sessions, safety briefings, neighborhood watch, and collaborations with their local non-profit and faith-based partners.
• **Peace Walks** with clergy and other community partners in neighborhoods most impacted by violence took place daily in August and September and continued twice a week through November.

• **Operation Hoodsie Cup:** The BPD utilized a refurbished ice cream truck to deliver free “hoodsie cups” to children and community residents in city neighborhoods, many times in conjunction with other ongoing activities and events.

**Outreach and Intervention**

• **YouthConnect**, a nationally recognized partnership between the BPD and the Boys & Girls Clubs formed in 1996, places social workers in police stations with front-line officers. Understanding that arrest will not provide youth with the social services they need, police officers instead make referrals to the in-house district social workers.

• **EPIC – Enhancing Potential Inspiring Change** – is a new program run by YouthConnect and funded by John Hancock to serve approximately 50 at-risk 11-14-year-olds and their families per year. The focus of the program will be to reduce risky behaviors and to increase positive decision-making skills while creating opportunities to increase self-awareness and confidence through the acquisition of leadership and work-readiness skills.

• **Operation Homefront** is a collaboration of the BPD School Police Unit, Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority Police, School Safety, social service agencies and faith-based organizations that addresses the belief that the family is the first line of defense against gang activity, truancy, etc. Police/clergy home visits are performed for youth at-risk of gang involvement. These are initiated on a school-by-school basis when a serious or concerning incident occurs or there is an escalating level of issues that may adversely affect school safety. This initiative provides a crucial link to parents, with various resources for parents, students and teachers to leverage in preventing problems for students.

• **Increased impact of BPD School Police Unit:** The Boston Police Department increased the number of officers in the School Police Unit in order to expand presence in elementary schools to engage in positive relationships and dialogues between students and police starting in first grade.

• **Operation Exit Trades Pre-Apprenticeship Program** is designed as an intensive training program to prepare participants for entry into an apprenticeship in the building trades. Through career readiness and occupational skills training encompassing classroom, peer-to-peer mentorship and hands-on learning experiences, Operation Exit will provide the knowledge and skills required for participants to apply for and enter into a state-registered building trades apprenticeship program. In addition, coordinated case management and placement services will be provided to assist participants in achieving their career goals. This is a partnership with the Mayor’s Public Safety Initiative and YOU Boston.

• **Homicide Outreach Program:** The BPD Homicide Unit has provided outreach and support to the families of homicide victims. This includes assistance with funerals, explanations of trial proceedings and referrals to available services.
Youth Programs

• **Boston Police Teen Academy**: Celebrating its fifth year, the Police Teen Academy is directed and operated by the Boston Police Academy during the summer. The Police Teen Academy helps the students connect with the police officers in their community while also building character and learning life skills. Conflict resolution is a major focus. All students are in need of a summer job and benefit from the minimum wages earned for their program attendance each week. The students receive gift cards provided by local businesses to help with the purchase of back-to-school clothes and supplies. During the six-week program, approximately 60 students participate in regular exercise regimens, public speaking experiences, community service efforts, and cooperatively learn to construct a bathroom from supplies donated by Home Depot.

• **P.A.L. to PALS** is a monthly visit by Boston Police Department personnel to local Boys & Girls Clubs in Boston. The monthly visits are two-dimensional: one part learning and interactive, the other part physical exercise. Each month, a different unit from the Boston Police Department will visit a different Boys & Girls Club site. The unit will speak on a topic related to their unit of assignment (Drug Unit – drugs, Gang Unit – gangs, etc.). Each visit will be scheduled for 90 minutes: Part lecture/dialogue and part physical, with officers playing basketball or another sport with the kids.

• **Youth Dialogues** are facilitated sessions to break down walls between youth and police. BPD partners with NAFI, Teen Empowerment, Roxbury Youthworks and the YWCA.

• **Boston Police Explorers Program** is a career exploration program partnership between the BPD and the Boy Scouts of America. The program is open to young men and women between the ages of 14 and 20 with an interest in learning more about careers in the field of law enforcement. The program provides career orientation experiences, leadership opportunities, and community service activities.

• **Police Referrals**: Police refer kids to the Mayor's Summer Jobs Program, which partners with the private sector and seeks to provide 10,000 youth per summer with meaningful employment. Kids also are referred to free or reduced-price summer camps at partner agencies.

Training

Training of recruit officers includes interaction with a community partners panel, community service projects, community policing case studies, trauma training and procedural justice. The current class that started in December will have an extra week of training in order to expand the one-day community service work to a full week.

• **De-escalation** is an important part of the BPD training curriculum and is taught in tandem with Use of Force.

• **Procedural Justice**: An eLearning course on procedural justice is being finalized for veteran officers.

• **Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP)**: In 2015, over 100 Command Staff members, middle managers and trainers received training in FIP by national expert Lori Fridell. The FIP training program applies the modern science of bias to policing; it trains officers on the effect of implicit bias and gives them the information and skills they need to
reduce and manage their biases. The curricula addresses, not just racial/ethnic bias, but biases based on other factors, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, and so forth.

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