

Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission
Community Policing Program
Annual Report

Section I

Appendix C

Agency: Ocean City Police Department

Region #: IV

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Submitted By: Name: Ashley Miller

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Number of sworn members: 116

Non-sworn members: 28

Jurisdictional Demographics: Population: 6,792 (*It should be noted that Ocean City welcomes nearly 8 million visitors every year.)

Square miles serviced by the agency: 4.41

White: 96.44% Black: 0.72% Hispanic: 0.03% Asian: 0.16%

Native American: 0.52% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0.00% More than one race: 2.14%

Section II

Instructions: Provide a detailed description of your agency's Community Policing Initiative by responding to the following **key points**. These key points address the Guiding Principles of Community Policing, as well as the Six Pillars identified in the Task Force on 21st Century Policing Report (see Guidelines for Reporting for explanation). Examples of specific programs, initiatives, and partnerships with community groups should be discussed along with any statistics or other relevant information. See *Appendix D: Examples of Best Practices in Community Policing* for your convenience and consideration.

Key Points:

- How community policing is integrated throughout your agency and how your agency incorporates community policing into its daily operation.
- How top management emphasizes or supports community policing within the agency.
- Training your agency has received in community policing and future plans to provide additional or specialized training to agency members to improve interaction with community members or problem solving efforts.
- How crime problems or community issues are identified and the method of communicating any trends with communities the agency services.
- How your agency partners with all segments of the community to prevent crime and address identified community problems. Segments of the community should include residential and business communities, schools, youth, minority groups, hospitals, senior population, faith based organizations, etc.
- How your agency measures the effectiveness of its community policing program.

1) How is community policing integrated throughout your agency and how does your agency incorporate community policing into its daily operations?

Response: At the Ocean City Police Department (OCPD), we consider the collaboration between the community and police as an essential part of our daily policing strategy. The overall coordination of community relations falls under the Deputy Communications Manager who reports directly to the Chief of Police. In addition, the OCPD takes a comprehensive approach to community policing and incorporates this philosophy into our daily activities across the entire department. We strive to practice this philosophy in all that we do, versus the idea that all community policing efforts fall on one staff member.

The Deputy Communications Manager serves as the primary liaison between the community and the police department. This position is responsible for issuing press releases, managing the Department's social media accounts, and ensuring that the Ocean City community remains informed about police activity and safety messages. This position also coordinates all police-community events.

In addition to several other long-standing initiatives, the department utilizes the following units daily, particularly in the summer months to assist in resolving chronic causes of crime:

Bike Patrol – The OCPD has used bicycles as part of our regular patrols, particularly in the downtown area, for several years. Bicycles offer our officers increased visibility and mobility. An officer on a bicycle is much more approachable to citizens and can help in building new contacts and trust with citizens. Officers on a bike are more easily able to handle criminal activity, as well.

Mounted Unit – Similar to bicycle patrol, the OCPD has had a Mounted Unit for several decades as a way to increase officer visibility. Patrolling on horseback allows the officer to see crowds of pedestrians. Additionally, the Mounted Unit is an excellent public relations tool. Nearly every night in the summer months, officers and their mounts will stop in popular areas to let citizens meet the horses. The Mounted Unit is also often deployed to special events throughout the city.

Special Enforcement Unit – The Special Enforcement Unit was created in 2013 and is a proactive, highly flexible, street-level criminal investigative unit comprised of detectives working closely with the community to identify problems and solve crimes. The Unit's focus includes identifying and addressing neighborhood quality of life concerns with an emphasis on reducing crime; monitoring repeat and violent offenders within our community; and can be rapidly deployed to public safety concerns.

2) How does top management emphasize or support community policing within your agency?

Response: The daily practice of community policing falls on every member of the Department, at every rank. Our sworn personnel are evaluated each year in several categories, one of which being "community-oriented policing". An exceptional rating in this category states: "Proactive and highly efficient in identifying and resolving problems in the community. Interacts positively with citizens and the public in general. Is highly receptive to individual problems and makes special efforts to provide assistance." Each sworn member of our department must adhere to this performance target, among others, regardless of rank or specialty. This ensures that officers, supervisors, and commanders meet or exceed performance targets that exemplify community policing.

Citizens must remain confident that they can trust each member of the OCPD. The mission of the OCPD is that personnel “shall provide the highest degree of ethical behavior, professional conduct, and quality police services to all residents and visitors.” Personnel within the Professional Standards Section ensure that our mission is upheld. This section is responsible for several administrative functions, including internal affairs and quality assurance. The Professional Standards Section is responsible for safeguarding transparency amongst our community, investigating citizen complaints of misconduct and including all department policies on the Department’s website. Additionally, citizens are now able to compliment officers, through our website, for outstanding performance in the course of their service to the community.

Aside from administrative requirements, the OCPD routinely cooperates with members of the community to assist them to be proactive in keeping their neighborhoods safe.

One of our initiatives is Neighborhood Watch. In the early 1990s, several Ocean City neighborhoods created Neighborhood Watch groups. These groups take it upon themselves to patrol their neighborhoods and report suspicious activity to the police immediately. Since its inception, the OCPD has been working very closely with each of these groups. Personnel will regularly attend Neighborhood Watch and/or community association meetings to present relevant safety information. Personnel assigned to each neighborhood vary in rank and assignment. Additionally, the Department regularly provides crime statistics and “heat maps” for each neighborhood. Keeping our community informed ensures not only a positive relationship but also reduces the fear of crime for our residents.

Each year, OCPD participates in National Night Out. National Night Out is an annual event that promotes community involvement in crime prevention activities, police-community partnerships, and neighborhood camaraderie. Several OCPD officers attended each event, including members of the Command Staff. This year, we hosted a new format for National Night Out. In the past, several neighborhoods would hold picnics that officers would visit. This year, we hosted a touch-a-truck-style event at one of our parks in Ocean City. The concept was to bring everyone together in one central location and showcase various first responder departments and the equipment they use.

3) Describe training your agency has received in community policing and future plans to provide additional or specialized training to agency members to improve interaction with community members or problem solving efforts.

Response: The OCPD trains its personnel on several topics related to effective community policing and problem-solving, including but not limited to:

Crisis Intervention Team – Nearly every OCPD officer has received training on how to properly handle incidents involving citizens experiencing mental distress. Crisis intervention training is designed to help officers recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness, as well as developmental and intellectual disabilities, that will assist officers in de-escalating a crisis and getting the individual the care and resources they need.

Active Shooter Response – Every OCPD officer has undergone active shooter response training at various public buildings within Ocean City, including the Roland E. Powell Convention Center.

Diversity Equality and Inclusion- We have started training officers in diversity, equality, and inclusion. In additionm, the Town of Ocean City has recently hired a new Recruitment, Inclusion, and Diversity position.

The OCPD engages members of our community by providing crime prevention and public safety training on many topics, including but not limited to:

Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) – CRASE has been taught by OCPD members to several local private and public organizations.

Citizens Police Academy – The OCPD hosts a Citizens Police Academy in partnership with the Maryland State Police, Worcester County Sheriff's Office, and Ocean Pines Police Department. This 10-week class offers citizens a unique opportunity to learn more about law enforcement in Worcester County and build relationships between the police and the community. During the course, students meet a variety of officers to learn about police topics, such as traffic enforcement, evidence collection, firearm safety, arrest procedures, and narcotics enforcement. Students also participate in practical scenarios, which afford citizens hands-on opportunities to understand various law enforcement applications.

4) Describe how crime problems or community issues are identified and addressed, and the method of communicating any trends with communities the agency services.

Response: The OCPD uses the following initiatives to improve engagement with the community and prevent crime:

Social Media – Social media has become an essential tool to keep citizens informed, ultimately instilling trust and community satisfaction. The OCPD uses Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and has a total of over 80,000 followers. In 2022, we saw an increase of 16,000 followers on our social media accounts.

Crime Tip Hotline – The Department recognizes that many people are reluctant to notify police about their suspicions and concerns about criminal activity. This is why the Department offers two methods for citizens to submit crime tips. One is by calling the hotline number at 410-520-5136 or by submitting tips through the departmental website, oceanscitymd.gov/police. Citizens can remain anonymous if they chose to do so.

Involvement with Community Groups – The Department finds it helpful and necessary to be involved with the many community groups throughout Ocean City. Not only is this helpful in building relationships with the community but also in achieving our policing goals. The OCPD is represented in the Worcester County Homelessness Task Force, Maryland Strategic Prevention Framework Coalition, Ocean City Pedestrian Safety Committee, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Ocean City Development Corp. Boardwalk Committee, and more.

Community Events – The Department holds several community events throughout the year to build relationships with the community including Coffee with Cops, National Night Out, Holiday Toy Drive, Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Maryland, Cover the Cruiser for Special Olympics, and appearances at schools and local special events.

5) Identify how your agency partners with all segments of the community to prevent crime and address identified community problems. Segments of the community should include residential

and business communities, schools, youth, minority groups, hospitals, senior population, faith based organizations, etc.

Response: The OCPD partners with multiple segments of our community to prevent crime and address community problems. We incorporate community involvement with community groups, volunteer opportunities, assistance from businesses, and tools to bring the community together.

The Police Commission was established by City Charter and comprises the Mayor and three Council Members. The Commission provides a forum to explore and discuss public safety issues of concern to the municipal government and the public. The Police Commission makes recommendations to the City Council and further advises the administration of the Police Department in the areas of staffing, special events, departmental policies, procedures, and other matters as may be required.

The OCPD Auxiliary Unit is a group of community volunteers who share the responsibility of keeping this community safe. Since 1999, the OCPD has trained civilians to support personnel and serve the citizens of Ocean City. These citizens volunteer to assist with operation duties, such as administrative support, public safety, community initiatives, Citizens Police Academy, and special events held in the Town of Ocean City.

Each year the Department hosts the Neighborhood Watch Officer of the Year Award Banquet. Members of the Neighborhood Watch groups are invited to join OCPD personnel for an awards banquet. At the banquet, promotions and commendations are recognized. The Neighborhood Watch Area Coordinators are tasked with selecting an "Officer of the Year".

The Town of Ocean City has several special events that take place that requires assistance from law enforcement allies from across the region. Allied agencies often require hotel stays and meals for the officers that they send to assist the OCPD. To make it easier for these agencies to send assistance, several members of the business community will offer free or discounted rooms and meals. This is a direct result of the relationships that the Department has built with the business community.

Business Cards – Since 2017, officers have been given business cards that include a safety message to hand out to local businesses. This gives the officers, particularly less-experienced seasonal officers, a reason to enter a business, introduce themselves, and build a relationship with the employees. This initiative was praised by several members of the business community and the Department received several comments that made the employees feel good knowing officers were checking on them.

Drug Drop Box – The OCPD's Drug Drop Box is located in the lobby of police headquarters and allows citizens to be proactive in ensuring that all unwanted, unused, and expired prescription medication is out of citizens' cabinets and off the streets of Ocean City. Citizens can drop off their unwanted or unused medications 24 hours a day, no questions asked. The Drop Box was donated by the Ocean City Elks Lodge.

6) *How does your agency measure the effectiveness of its community policing program?*

Response: The OCPD currently employs a civilian Crime Analyst. This position is within the Criminal Investigation Division. The information that this employee gleaned from crime statistics is invaluable. Using this information, patrol officers can strategize more effectively, the Special

Enforcement Unit can focus their efforts more succinctly, and citizens can feel comfort in knowing exactly how their neighborhood is doing statistically.

Social media plays a role in everyday life, not only for our department but for our community. Being able to push breaking information out via social media accounts lets our community know immediately if there is a concern. Having an official account, lets our community know where to go to get the most accurate and timely information. Social media also allows community members to share photos of their loved ones with our officers and share personnel encounter stories with our department.

NOTE: Email Agency report and document(s) to: pctc.mandates@maryland.gov