

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

Development and Implementation
of the Citizen Police Academy for
Small Agencies

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Abstract

Effective law enforcement practices require the confidence and cooperation of our citizens. When a police-citizen contact occurs, the meeting generates an assessment on the part of the citizen. That appraisal may contain perceptions and judgements erroneous and antagonistic toward the officer and the agency. A citizen police academy program will address these issues.

Citizen police academies develop partnerships with communities to educate the public about the operations of the agency, criminal justice system, ways to resist crime, and appropriate security measures the citizen may employ to protect themselves and their property. Citizen police academy instruction may include any topic the agency desires. The students are educated on department policies, rules, regulations, criminal investigation, and other subjects.

The purpose of this research is to identify the advantages of a citizen police academy for smaller agencies and recommendations on ways to develop and implement such a program. A review of the history and development of citizen police academies by other agencies is examined.

It is my belief that agencies benefit from citizen police academies through citizen involvement. There is increased support for police functions and expansion of community-based crime prevention efforts. Not only do citizens learn about agency practices and services, officers recognize the concerns and perceptions of the community.

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Introduction

The goal of this research is to aid smaller law enforcement agencies in developing and implementing a citizen police academy. This research will assist smaller agencies in understanding the importance and benefits of interaction between police officers and citizens. The data acquired on the cost, training, implementation, advantages, and disadvantages of a Citizen Police Academy will be useful information for smaller agencies interested in such a program.

Smaller communities now face the types of crimes once confined to large cities. Increased crime in any community will influence public opinion which will impact the local agency and officer contact with citizens will increase. Officer contact is probably the most important contribution to citizen opinion, whether positive or negative. Public opinion of police agencies is created by misperceptions, speculations, misunderstandings, and rumor. Police agencies need the assistance of the community to have a stronger impact on crime, and police agencies should not hesitate to enlist the services of their law-abiding community members (Greenburg 1991).

This research will demonstrate that smaller agencies can benefit from the experiences of large agencies that have implemented citizen police academies (Cole 1994). Citizen police academies help agencies gain support for police work, expand community-based crime prevention efforts, and can eliminate or reduce some misconceptions of police practices. Citizen

involvement heightens awareness. Through awareness in the form of a two-way learning process, local residents, business and community leaders learn about the operations of the agency while officers realize more about what makes up the fiber of the community (Greenburg 1991).

Citizen police academies increase understanding between citizens and police through education. Officers instruct citizens on topics involving actual police training and the officers get the opportunity to interact in a positive manner with the citizens. Participants can be better prepared to cope with criminal incidents. They are more willing to report crime, and realize the need to testify when required. Citizens can be utilized as sources for new ideas and give law enforcement agencies data about concerns of community members (Cole 1994).

The sources of literature on this subject are newsletters, newspapers, periodicals, other agencies' programs, interviews, books, and survey instrument. The majority of these sources of literature discuss the police community relations and resource aspect of citizen police academies.

Historical, Legal, and Theoretical Context

The Citizen Police Academy concept was introduced in 1977 by Devon and Cornwall Constabulary Middle Moore, Exeter, United Kingdom. Also known as the "Police Night School," academy classes were held one evening a week for ten weeks. The program was designed to familiarize private citizens with the nature of

the police system in the United Kingdom. Public interest and participation blossomed, resulting in many other constabularies consequently following suit (Ferguson 1985).

Classes were held at the Exeter headquarters of the Devon and Cornwall force. The classes were held on Wednesday evenings for ten weeks. During the early stages of the course it became apparent that most of the participants were almost totally ignorant of the nature of police work that the average police officer takes for granted. The most encouraging elements of the pilot course were the enthusiasm of police speakers, who volunteered their time, and the attending public who, at the conclusion, expressed a desire to learn more about the functions of the force.

The Orlando, Florida, Police Department organized the first Citizen Police Academy in the United States in 1985. The academy classes also convened one evening a week for ten weeks. The program was patterned after the methods used in the United Kingdom. However, students in the Orlando program were also given the option to complete a short course in the use of police sidearms and ride as observers with officers on patrol (Ferguson 1985).

In 1986, the Missouri City, Texas Police Department introduced the first Citizen Police Academy in Texas. The Missouri City academy was modeled after the Orlando, Florida academy. The ensuing success of the program resulted in expansion of the academy to eleven weeks of instruction, and

incorporation of firearms practice and safety courses as a regular element of the curriculum. Since the introduction of the Citizen Police Academy in Texas many other agencies have developed programs as a result of the Missouri City success (Bryson 1991).

The slogan of the Citizen Police Academy is "Understanding Through Education," and its goal is to provide the citizens that attended with enough information to disseminate suspicions and misconceptions while increasing harmony with police through an educational process.

There appears to be no earnest difficulties of legal ramifications in respect to citizen police academies and agencies that conduct a citizen police academy. However, as with any type of police training, there is a possibility of injury. Therefore, all applicants for enrollment in the citizen police academy are required to fill out an application form. The agency processes the application in a manner that will provide security for the department, including a driver license and criminal history check. If accepted, the academy applicant is required to complete a release of liability form, which is necessary due to the nature of training (Lawson 1990).

Theory suggests that society gets the amount of crime it is willing to tolerate (Miller 1987). As a management philosophy, community policing is a partnership in public safety between the people and their police (Peverly and Phillips 1993). A citizen police academy is a police department interactive program

designed to educate the public about its department policies, regulations the criminal justice system, and ways to reduce crime. Citizen police academies promote the sharing of ideas and information, in addition to interaction in a very positive and proactive setting (Duncanville Police Department Citizen Police Academy Student Manual 1990). Citizen police academies influence public opinion and promote better relations between police and community, consequently there is additional support and confidence in the police. Citizen police academies promote increased morale within the agency (Greenburg 1991). Citizens develop a commitment to maintain an involvement in neighborhood watch programs and the reduction of crime (Ferguson 1985).

Review of Literature and Practice

The Orlando, Florida Police Department conducted their first citizen police academy in 1985. The academy was modeled after the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary "Police Night School" for private citizens. The British program was conducted one evening a week for ten weeks. The school was instructed by police personnel, who volunteered their time. Instruction, was on the nature of police work and organization of the police system. The program received a very positive response by the participants. Citizens were anxious to learn of the operations of their police force, and relations with the public were much improved. Orlando's program was very successful resulting in expansion of the academy to eleven evening sessions, and incorporation of

firearms practice and safety training.

The first citizen police academy conducted in Texas was implemented by the Missouri City, Texas Police Department in 1986. Modeled after the Orlando, Florida Citizen Police Academy, the Missouri City program was conducted one evening a week for ten weeks. The academy was conducted by police personnel with instruction given on actual police training. Participants were given an option to complete a short course in the use of firearms and students could also ride as observers with officers on patrol (Bryson 1991).

The Duncanville, Texas Police Department conducted its first citizen police academy, modeled after the Missouri City program, in 1990. Duncanville has a successful academy, however, officers reached burn-out with the ride along program due to the number of students and academies conducted. The ride along activity was discontinued during the citizen police academy in 1993 (Ramon 1993).

Robert A. (Bob) Lawson of the Terrell, Texas Police Department conducted a study on citizen police academies in 1990. This study included some history and information on legal liabilities, cost, training, and benefits of citizen police academies (Lawson 1990).

The Telemasp Bulletin published by the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, May 1994 issue, published the results of a survey of citizen police academies in Texas. Both large and small agencies were surveyed with sixty

five agencies identified as conducting a citizen police academy. The survey identified topics taught, instructing personnel, cost, recruitment, ethnicity/race of students, length of academy, hours of instruction, age of students, benefits, participant awards, number of students, and what should be considered when developing a citizen police academy. Responding agencies noted positive effects such as improved relations with the public and financial support for the program and agency (Hilson 1994).

My research consists of a survey of citizen police academies in Texas, which began in November 1994 and was completed in January 1995. I mailed my survey to the list of agencies that the Telemasp survey used, and a list of communities with populations under fourteen thousand people. Forty-four Texas agencies with thirty, and under, sworn officers were targeted (U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation 1993). Ten of the thirty-nine responding agencies that conducted a citizen police academy were thirty officer or below agencies.

The survey identified topics taught, instruction personnel, recruitment, participation awards, number of students, length of academy, hours of instruction, cost, benefits, times held yearly, age of students, and recruitment. Agencies noted improved relations with the public, community and officer support, financial support for the program and agency, active citizen involvement with volunteers and support for projects.

The method used by large and small agencies to recruit participants in a citizen police academy were basically the same.

All agencies used application forms and all conduct a background check. There is no specified age requirements for participation. Smaller agencies' academy size ranged from 10-15 students to 25-30 students. Most small agencies held academies two times a year, with classes held three hours a week for eleven weeks. The average total hours of attendance was thirty-three hours for smaller agency academies. Budgeting cost will depend on the number of students, length of the program, supplies needed, and man hours for instruction. Smaller agencies used mostly compensation, duty, and volunteer time to offset cost. Sources for budgeting large and small agency citizen police academies were virtually identical, and topics taught in smaller agencies are almost identical to those taught in larger agencies. Academy students do not receive grades, they either pass or fail. Most of the smaller agencies conduct program evaluations and cited improved relations with citizens (Survey 1995).

Discussion of Relevant Issues

Community policing through a citizen police academy identifies community safety issues, determines resources, and applies innovative strategies designed to create and sustain healthy, vital neighborhoods (Austin 1992). Citizen police academies improve communication with the community and serves as a valuable problem-solving resource. The participants of a citizen police academy have the potential to influence public opinion in a positive manner (Enns 1995). Citizen police

academies encourage officers and students to speak freely and frankly, allowing camaraderie between the public and police that extends beyond the classroom (Whitman 1993). Community policing through a citizen police academy does not transform police officers into social workers, but combines the familiarity, trust, and sense of ownership necessary in a partnership working together to reduce crime. A community that is more involved with its police agency translates into a community more willing to cooperate with its police (Bobinsky 1994).

Before beginning a citizen police academy, it is important that the agency set goals for the program. The curriculum must provide the citizen with the knowledge and tools to accomplish these goals (Radelet and Carter 1994).

There must be a total commitment to the program by the host agency. The citizen police academy coordinator must be one of the best officers within the agency, and must be very strong in leadership and training skills (Wallach 1991).

Many law enforcement agencies have a volunteer program in which citizen police academy graduates perform volunteer work in the agency. The volunteers perform some of the clerical duties, administrative work and mundane tasks that ultimately rob officers of time that could be better spent fighting crime (McKay 1994).

Budgeting a citizen police academy, depending on the program may be as little as nothing, or as large as you want, depending on the program. Cost of implementation can vary due to citizen

response, type of training provided, materials used, number of students, salaries for the officers involved, personnel involved in instruction, the application process, training facility, graduation certificates, graduation dinner, and length of the course will dictate the cost of the program (Lawson 1990). Citizen police academy alumni associations have deterred or eliminated the cost of future citizen police academy programs in many cases. Some of these programs are funded by alumni donations, while other citizen police academy programs are funded by confiscated drug funds. Still other academy programs are funded by citizen donations and business donations. Some academies are funded by a combination of these donated funds, confiscated funds, or the costs are included in the annual budget. A few of the smaller agencies use donations from participating students to fund the program (Survey 1995).

The citizen police academy will create understanding between citizens and police. Understanding through education, dispel suspicions and misconceptions and citizens enjoy increased rapport with police (Lawson 1990). Public involvement in a citizen police academy expands community-based crime prevention efforts. Participants can be better prepared to cope with criminal incidents, may be more willing to report crime, and realize the need to testify in court when required (Greenburg 1991).

Police officers also may realize they have the support of some members in the community which could lead to a more

professional and industrious officer (Seelmeyer 1980). Providing a citizen police academy program can gain support for police work, and encourage private citizens to undertake appropriate security measures. Smaller law enforcement agencies can achieve the benefits that can be realized from a change in philosophy toward a new partnership with the community (Cox 1992).

Conclusion/Recommendations

The purpose of this research project is to assist smaller agencies in developing and implementing a citizen police academy.

The findings of this study will give smaller agencies a view of the benefits and encumbrances of such a program.

There is much emphasis in law enforcement today as to the advantages of community policing. Many citizens cannot comprehend why the police act or do not act in certain instances, therefore police conduct and integrity are often questioned. Citizen police academies, through education, help citizens perceive and deal with these problems.

Law enforcement agencies can build any type of program they can afford. The costs incurred depend on many factors including materials needed, training given, number of students, hours of instruction, manpower allocation, method of compensation for instructors and many more components discussed in this document.

The agency must be absolutely committed to the program, and should develop some activity for the students after graduation to involve the participants with the agency in crime prevention or

other duties to free officers.

Community policing through a citizen police academy is one of the most powerful, efficient, and practical methods to encourage relations with the citizens we serve. Citizen police academy programs have the potential of reducing crime in the community through knowledge and awareness. Citizen academy participants can be utilized as sources for new ideas and give law enforcement agencies information about concerns of community members. Allowing citizens a first hand look at rules, regulations, and policies the police follow, misconceptions of police activities may be alleviated and community relations enhanced.

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