Reimagine Policing Plan

A New Vision for Boulder

**An Overview**

CITY OF BOULDER
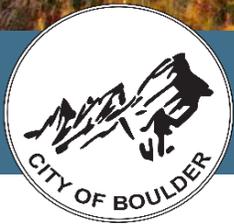
Two years ago, the Boulder Police Department began to think differently about its future. With a new chief and a recognition that the profession needed to address a history of negative impacts, mostly in communities of color, this department committed to change.

Since then, there's been lots of community engagement.
We've heard great ideas and, sometimes difficult, feedback from many of you.

We took this learning to heart, drew from best practices in policing reform, and developed a plan designed to shape a new approach here in Boulder.

The plan is called "Reimagine Policing."
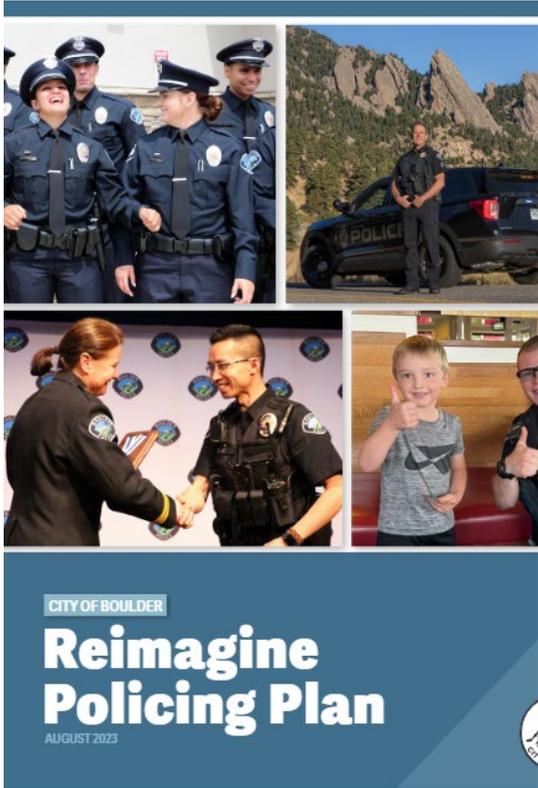
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AUGUST 2023

## Call Load, Types of Calls, & Where They Come From

In the current state, most police action in Boulder starts with a call for service. From 2017-2020, the department averaged 52,000 calls from the public per year. This average is down from 2013, when the department handled about 64,000 calls (Figure 2).[1]

Figure 2

Calls for Service to the Boulder Police Department, 2013–2020
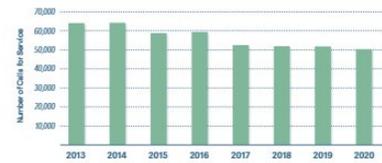
Although the volume of calls to the police has gone down, the Boulder Police Department handled far more calls per 1,000 community members in recent years than other benchmark cities (Figure 3). The Boulder Police Department had the most calls per 1,000 community members in 2020, and the third most calls when using data from both 2020 and 2021.

Figure 3

Calls per Capita – Boulder & Benchmark Cities 2020–2021
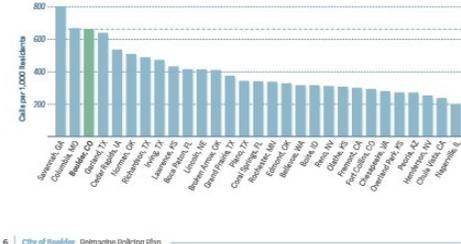
A NEW CENTRAL STRATEGY: PROBLEM-SOLVING POLICING

Despite results that show general satisfaction with the response of officers when individuals call for help, transformation that builds trust, actually reduces crime and prevents disproportionate harm to communities of color requires a whole new model.

We call this problem-solving policing, and it is the central tenet of the Reimagine Policing Plan.

This strategy is important because short interactions, particularly in moments of crisis, are unlikely to build long-term trust, even if police handle every call well. If the Boulder Police Department is to take the comments and values of its community seriously, it cannot merely tinker with the status quo.

What Do We Mean by Problems?

Problems are conditions that occur in a community that cause harm. They may be actual crimes. In other instances, they may be situations that are likely to lead to crime or generally make people feel unsafe.

In the traditional call-and-respond model of policing, where individuals summon officers by dialing 9-1-1, officers become involved in the most immediate and visible result of the problem. They are expected to resolve the issue, usually by arresting the offender. When this is done well, the individual who has been immediately harmed may get some form of support from victim advocates.

But then, police clear the scene.

The problem, however, rarely leaves with them.

Let's consider the following examples: Say there is an apartment building in Boulder that has little security. This situation creates an ideal environment for burglaries. Police handling of each burglary, if and when it is reported, will not stop the burglaries. Even the arrest of one burglar is unlikely to make much of a difference, because nothing has been done to address the opportunities for burglary. Another example is an intersection that is the site of multiple car crashes. Quick responses to each crash, humane treatment of the people involved, and thorough accident investigation reports will not stop the next crash. Fights among students leaving a high school will not be stopped by breaking up each fight as it occurs.

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS & VALUES

While information about the nature of the work is valuable, any plan that is intended to serve community must also reflect the context of that community.

To understand how policing in Boulder is perceived, and to determine what community members want from the department as it evolves, the city launched a comprehensive effort to engage with the public. This process spanned 19 months and included four phases, or windows, for feedback. Each one was designed to reach interested community members, and especially those who belong to populations that have been disproportionally impacted in negative ways by policing. Some approaches worked well; others provided lessons. The city refined its process as it went, based on these lessons. Community process was also informed by the Reimagine Policing Process Subcommittee, comprised of two councilmembers and two community members selected through an application process[1]. The city's overall engagement process, including more details about who participated, is described in the Community Engagement Summary [LINK 2].

This chapter provides an analysis of the feedback and draws from the following four sets of information:

1. A survey conducted by the National Policing Institute (NPI), an outside consultant contracted by the city to conduct community engagement in the last engagement period, which centered on response to a draft Reimagine Policing plan.

2. Qualitative feedback collected from approximately 1,600 people during all four engagement periods, including the identification of shared community values related to safety; deep participation by young people; and finally, interviews and focus groups conducted by NPI, which accompanied the survey.

3. A survey of people who called the Boulder Police Department for help over a five-month period in 2021. Most people in Boulder, as in other communities, have little or no direct contact with police. These results provide the perspective of individuals who interacted directly with officers in 2021. They were invited to provide feedback in 2022 as part of a research project.

4. Responses from local and national civil rights experts to the first draft of the Reimagine Policing plan, as requested by Boulder City Council. This audience, particularly in the case of experts that are not local, may be less familiar with the context of policing in Boulder but has studied standard policing practices deeply and is often more critical of them.

Looked at holistically, respondents put forth a set of challenging questions that are valuable as Boulder seeks to reimagine policing.

What We Heard

Our community wants a future where:

- We are all free to enjoy public and private spaces without fear of harm

- Laws are enforced equitably

- Police respond professionally and respectfully when we need them, but we have alternative and creative resources to address problems not suited to policing

- We demonstrate we are a compassionate community that supports the basic needs and the right to be free from crime for all community members

- Criminal behavior is met with accountability measures that are fair and just within policing and other systems, with opportunities for individuals to be supported in underlying issues

- Officers are part of the communities they serve, building relationships and understanding and addressing problems before having to step up enforcement and resort to force

The new plan calls for a shift from "old" call-and-respond model to a "new" problem-oriented policing model.
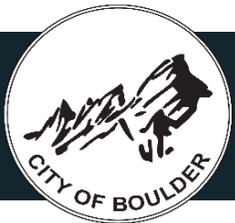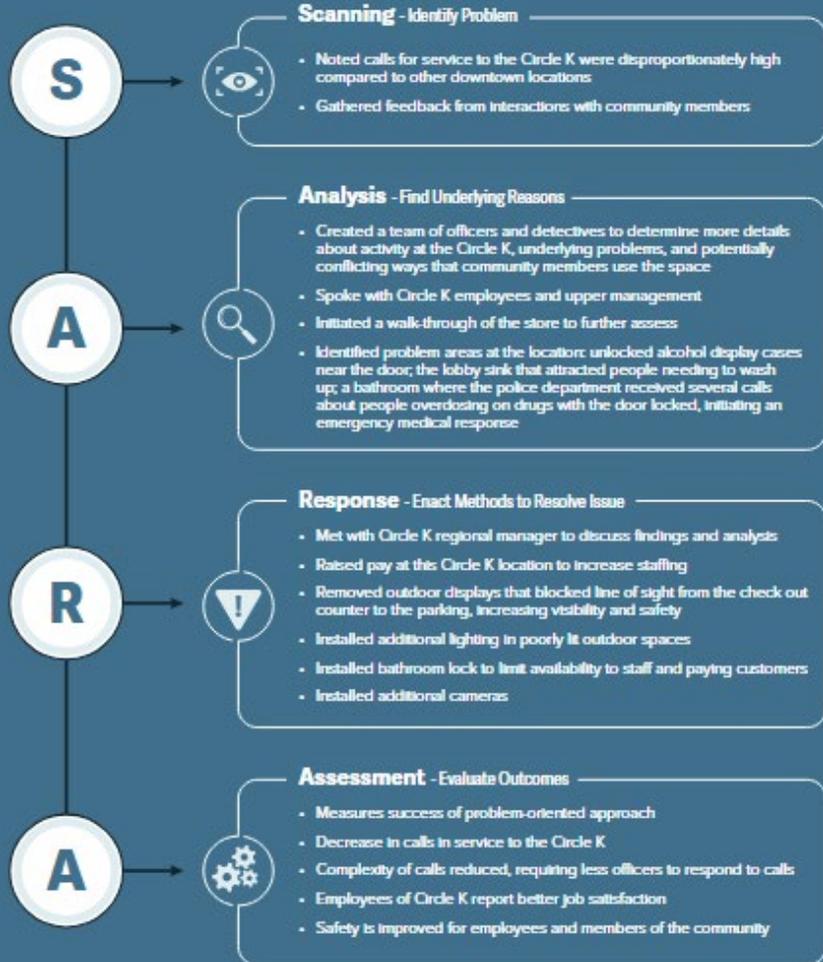
Figure 23

Problem-Solving Policing Case Study: Circle K

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Scanning - Identify Problem
- Noted calls for service to the Circle K were disproportionately high compared to other downtown locations
- Gathered feedback from interactions with community members

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Analysis - Find Underlying Reasons
- Created a team of officers and detectives to determine more details about activity at the Circle K, underlying problems, and potentially conflicting ways that community members use the space
- Spoke with Circle K employees and upper management
- Initiated a walk-through of the store to further assess
- Identified problem areas at the location: unlocked alcohol display cases near the door; the lobby sink that attracted people needing to wash up; a bathroom where the police department received several calls about people overdosing on drugs with the door locked, initiating an emergency medical response

R

Response - Enact Methods to Resolve Issue
- Met with Circle K regional manager to discuss findings and analysis
- Raised pay at this Circle K location to increase staffing
- Removed outdoor displays that blocked line of sight from the check out counter to the parking, increasing visibility and safety
- Installed additional lighting in poorly lit outdoor spaces
- Installed bathroom lock to limit availability to staff and paying customers
- Installed additional cameras

A

Assessment - Evaluate Outcomes
- Measures success of problem-oriented approach
- Decrease in calls in service to the Circle K
- Complexity of calls reduced, requiring less officers to respond to calls
- Employees of Circle K report better job satisfaction
- Safety is improved for employees and members of the community

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The **SARA Model** helps police work together with businesses, other city departments, and community members to:

SCAN: identify the problem

ANALYZE: find the underlying factors that are contributing to the problem and understand why this problem is happening in this specific place and way in Boulder

RESPOND: work together with community partners to resolve the issues using a holistic approach

ASSESS: evaluate whether the problem-oriented solutions worked, whether safety has been improved, and identify what, if any, problems still remain

This problem-solving model reimagines a police service for Boulder that focuses on community-based problem-solving. The goal is to increases public safety, foster trust, and prevent crime before it occurs.

Increase neighborhood and community problem-solving meetings

Implement technology that lets people rate their interactions with police right after they occur
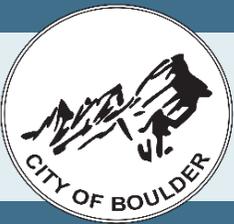
Co-create a youth engagement program

Improve performance tracking and implement an
early warning system if there are concerns about officer behavior

Thank You!