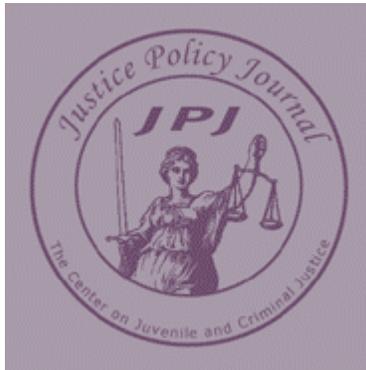


**Police-Probation Partnerships:
Managing the Risks and
Maximizing Benefits**

David Murphy, Ph.D.*



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** David Murphy is an assistant professor in the Criminal Justice Department at Western Oregon University.*

Abstract

Police-probation partnerships, along with other types of interagency partnerships, have become increasingly popular in recent years. In spite of this popularity, or perhaps because of it, concerns have been raised about the potential risks associated with these collaborative efforts. This study explores these concerns and evaluates the threats they pose to the effectiveness and credibility of police-probation partnerships. Training and policy recommendations for law enforcement and community corrections administrators are offered.

About the Author

David Murphy is an assistant professor in the Criminal Justice Department at Western Oregon University. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science with an emphasis in Criminal Justice from Washington State University. His current research agenda is focused on exploring the dynamics of police-probation partnerships. He has published in *Justice Quarterly* and *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*. His first book, *Making Police-Probation Partnerships Work* (LFB Scholarly) was published in 2005.

Police-Probation Partnerships: Managing the Risks and Maximizing Benefits

Introduction

Partnerships between criminal justice organizations represent a central component of modern public safety enhancement efforts. For example, such collaborations have recently emerged throughout the United States out of larger strategies designed to enhance interagency information sharing (Brazeau and Peterson 2000) and for purposes of improving the effectiveness of law enforcement (Evans 1997), community corrections (Worrall and Gaines 2006), offender reentry (Burke 2001), child custody and child protection (Gould 1999; Reulbach and Tewksbury 1994) and school violence response and prevention efforts (Tapper, Kleinman, and Nakashian 1997).

Police-probation partnerships, specifically, are believed to have a positive impact on community problem solving efforts (Glensor and Peak 1998; Sadd and Grinc 2000; Spelman and Eck 2000) and community safety in general (Cochran and McDevitt 1998; Parent and Snyder 1999). As a result, in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the level of attention these partnerships have received from researchers, policymakers, and criminal justice practitioners alike. Despite this attention, relatively little is known about the dynamics of these interagency partnerships, especially in terms of the impact that they have on the officers and the agencies involved.

Although very few researchers have systematically examined police-probation partnerships, there are reasons to have optimistic expectations regarding their ultimate utility. For example, there is the potential for these partnerships to enhance the effectiveness of both law enforcement and community corrections agencies in the accomplishment of their public safety and rehabilitative goals. Specifically, these

collaborations have the capacity to contribute to the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts to protect citizens from victimization by repeat offenders, thereby improving public safety and the quality of community life. For instance, Corbett, Fitzgerald, and Jordan (1998) concluded that a joint effort involving police and probation officers in Boston (known as the Night Light program) was correlated with significant reductions in assaults with firearms in the city. In another study of a police-probation partnership in San Bernardino, CA, Worrall and Gaines (2006) observed reductions in juvenile arrests after the implementation of a police-probation collaboration program.

Despite the array of potential benefits associated with police-probation partnerships, it is essential to acknowledge that these programs also have the capacity to lead to serious problems. In order for the full benefits of these partnerships to be enjoyed, participating agencies must recognize the possibility for these problems, assess them, and make efforts to minimize their effects.

This paper includes an examination of several specific challenges that police and community corrections administrators should be prepared to manage. For example, officers involved in police-probation collaborations face new stressors that stem from the changing nature of their work assignments. Additionally, officers engaged in collaborative activities may be susceptible to experiencing role conflict and role ambiguity. These outcomes have the potential to undermine morale and threaten to detract from the ability of partnerships to produce maximum benefits. This study addresses some of these concerns, focusing specifically on the potential problems of *mission creep*, *mission distortion*, and *organizational lag* (see Corbett 1998).

Expanding on Corbett's (1998) examination of interagency partnerships, a case study was conducted in order to assess the impact of implementing police-probation partnerships as experienced by the participating officers and agencies. The goal of the study is to provide information that agency administrators can utilize to better prepare officers and managers for the challenges associated with establishing and, ultimately, maintaining mutually productive collaborative interagency relationships.

Method

Extensive semi-structured interviews conducted with police officers and probation officers involved in an active police-probation partnership underway in Spokane, Washington served as the core source of data for this study¹. This partnership is designed to facilitate a collaborative working relationship between officers employed by the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Spokane Police Department (SPD). As part of their involvement in the partnership, these officers are co-assigned to offices in satellite public safety substations known as "COPS-Shops."

Research Setting

The partnership that is the focal point of this study is an extension of the non-profit, citizen-driven COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) program. The COPS program is a product of a broader citizen-driven movement designed to expand the public's role in solving local public safety problems. COPS-Shops--part neighborhood

i. The partnership reviewed for this study is implemented on a limited basis (rather than organization-wide) resulting in a limited number of officers participating directly in the program. All of the police (n=10) and probation officers (n=13) who were participating in the program at the time of the study were interviewed. The participating officers comprised distinct units within their respective agencies. These officers voluntarily applied for placement in the COPS-Shops and typically viewed their assignment as equivalent to a promotion. For both the police and the community corrections officer populations, the majority was white, middle-aged, male and of a veteran status within their organization. The police officers involved in the partnership had an average of 19.6 years of law enforcement experience while their probation officer counterparts had an average of 8.7 years of experience in community corrections (see Murphy 2005).

resource center and part auxiliary public safety station--serve as the vehicle by which the COPS program is delivered to the public.

The first of Spokane's COPS-Shops opened its doors in 1992 and within 8 years a total of 10 had been established in neighborhoods throughout the city. These COPS-Shops are designed to permit citizens to work directly with public safety officials to address neighborhood public safety problems. Neighborhood residents and business owners are responsible for providing a facility (usually a storefront or a small house) and the volunteer personnel necessary to support each COPS-Shop². The SPD was the first to take the initiative to provide support for the program by "donating" specialized patrol officers who were assigned to make their offices in these facilities. As COPS-Shops evolved and became more popular, more agencies sought opportunities to get involved. By 2000, the Department of Corrections got on board by assigning select probation officers to these locations. At the time of this study, the total number of officials working out of COPS-Shops was continually expanding with code enforcement personnel, juvenile probation officers, and other officials joining in. In addition to providing officers, the agencies involved typically provide administrative assistance and limited financial support (primarily for utilities and maintenance) to the COPS program.

Although the assignment of officers to COPS-Shops reflect the intent of the SPD and DOC to facilitate a more effective working relationship with the public, the officers who were selected for participation were under-prepared for the challenges they would encounter. These officers were not provided with specific policies to guide them as they

² The roles of citizen/neighborhood resident volunteers generally included staffing the front desk at each COPS-Shop and working on various COPS-Shop-related projects, often in conjunction with the Spokane Police Department (e.g., neighborhood cleanup efforts). Specific activities of COPS-Shop volunteers included receiving visitors, answering phones, and providing assistance to other residents who call or drop in to report suspicious activity and other problems in the neighborhood.

established their working partnership. The participating officers were merely provided with general directives outlining their most basic duties. Interviews with the participating officers revealed that each agency failed to take the formal proactive efforts that were necessary to identify and prevent many of the problems the officers quickly experienced. Instead of taking a proactive approach to these inevitabilities, each agency appeared to expect officers to address problems on an as-needed basis, typically through informal consultation with their respective supervisor. Because neither agency developed a set of adequate operational guidelines for officers, one must look elsewhere for evidence of the agencies' expectations for the partnership. The most illuminating official statements are offered in the form of basic descriptions of each program. These are summarized as follows.

By being placed in COPS-Shops, police officers (known as Neighborhood Resource Officers or NROs) serve as liaisons between the police department and the neighborhood residents. The NRO's general role in the COPS-Shop program is outlined by the SPD as follows:

Neighborhood Resource Officers (NROs) help residents identify and solve problems that affect the viability of their neighborhoods. NROs are based in each COPS substation, and use that base to expand out into the community to help citizens solve their own problems. NROs interact regularly with COPS substations in their area of responsibility, providing direction and presence when necessary. NROs provide a positive police presence (Spokane Police Department 1998).

The role of probation officers (known as Community Corrections Officers or CCOs) is expressed in similar terms by the DOC.

[The program represents]...a new way of doing business for the Department of Corrections (DOC). [The program] involves DOC becoming a partner with the community in crime prevention efforts. [The program] places Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) within Community Oriented Policing

Substations (COPS-Shops), where they work cooperatively with community members. Since each COPS-Shop neighborhood is different, [probation officers] tailor their interventions to the unique needs of the communities they serve.

The [program] is committed to work in partnership with the community, law enforcement, and other shareholders to help promote safety and improve the community's overall quality of life (State of Washington Department of Corrections 1997).

Both agencies emphasize the importance of partnerships for purposes of achieving problem solving objectives, yet neither offers a clear vision for how such partnerships should be established and managed. Each agency seems content to assign officers to share common workspaces in the COPS-Shops—where they have the unprecedented opportunity to work side by side every day--and to charge the officers themselves with the burden of sorting out the details on an ad-hoc, largely unsupervised, basis.

Procedure

Research subjects were asked numerous questions about their experiences as participants in the partnership.³ Particular emphasis was directed towards eliciting specific information about the level and type of interagency cooperation produced by the partnership. Additionally, questions were designed to produce first-hand accounts of the obstacles officers experienced as partnership participants. Specific questions assessed the following:

³ Interviews were conducted over a period of approximately 4 months. In order to obtain supplemental information and to place the interview data in context, direct field observations were conducted on a variety of occasions over a period of several months following the interviews.

The officers interviewed for this study frequently noted that local neighborhood residents would interrupt their work with mundane and misdirected comments, questions, and concerns. As a result, these police and probation officers found themselves serving as referral agents, directing residents to those agencies (e.g., the Office of Code Enforcement) equipped to offer proper services.

Furthermore, due to the inability or unwillingness of their sponsoring agencies to pay for maintenance and janitorial services at COPS-Shops, officers stationed in these locations were literally required to clean their own offices and restrooms. Officers in at least one COPS-Shop even found it necessary to obtain and install their own air conditioning unit.

- The nature and extent of the partnership's impact on the daily activities of officers. Individual questions were designed to determine the partnership's specific impact on each officer's relationship with other officers/partnership participants, offenders (probationers in particular) and other neighborhood residents.
- The partnership's effects on each officer's philosophical mission orientation.
- The views of officers about their agency's efforts to prepare and train them for the challenges of the partnership.

The following is a list of examples of these questions, extracted from the questionnaire administered to probation officers. Similar but revised questions were also administered to police officers.

- How has working at a COPS-Shop influenced your working relationship with the police?
- Has your philosophy of how to deal with offenders changed due to this partnership with the police?
- Does the philosophy of the [police officers] conflict with the mission of the DOC in how offenders should be supervised in the community?
- Given your current position, what would be the optimal caseload?
- Do you feel stress related to your job?
- Does working with the community affect your level of stress? In what ways?
- What other agencies do you have the most contact with?
- Of the training that you have received, what has been the most helpful to you?
- Is there any additional training that should be provided?
- What type of guidance do you receive on the job?

For purposes of identifying interview respondents in a fashion compatible with confidentiality assurances, each was assigned a three digit identification number. Probation officers were assigned numbers beginning with 1 (e.g., 106) while police officers were assigned numbers beginning with 5 (e.g., 501). The comments which have been included in the following sections are cited according to this identification scheme.

Confidentiality has been maintained by omitting any and all interview excerpts that could be used to identify specific respondents. In suitable instances, these excerpts have been revised. For example, specific details (e.g., names, dates, and places) have been replaced with equivalent, but general information. In addition, some excerpts have been slightly edited for clarification purposes. Brackets (i.e. []) have been used to indicate where such alterations have been necessary.

Because this partnership has been implemented on a limited rather than organization-wide basis, the number of officers participating at the time of this study was quite small. For this reason, a qualitative research design has been utilized. Further, as this study was conducted when the partnership was still in its early stages, it represents not an outcomes assessment but rather a process evaluation. As such, findings and observations are designed to identify early indications of emerging problems associated with police-probation partnerships. Conclusions and policy recommendations are shared with the goal of assisting agency administrators to better understand and, ultimately, anticipate these potential problems before they threaten the success of future partnership implementation efforts.

Findings and Recommendations

The first step toward the proper management of police-probation partnerships may simply entail recognizing that these partnerships, whether sanctioned or otherwise, are likely (if not inevitable) extensions of community policing and community corrections initiatives. As a result, these findings are relevant even in communities where no formal police-probation partnership has been expressly sanctioned by local law enforcement and community corrections agencies. As community policing and community corrections innovations continue to evolve around the country and as efforts are made to foster new forms of interagency collaboration, the decentralization of command structures will continue to increase the level of discretion placed at the disposal of police officers and probation officers. As a result, these officers will continue to develop formal and informal networks designed to improve their ability to accomplish their respective, although often related, goals. As police officers and probation officers continue to experiment with various innovations in the community setting, they will increasingly turn to one another for assistance. It is inevitably the case that community policing and community corrections will intersect at certain key points in their development.

In Spokane, efforts have been made to formalize, and even expedite, how and when these intersections will occur within the local neighborhood setting. For purposes of maximizing the utility of police-probation partnerships and reducing the potential for negative consequences, this is surely a wise choice. Regardless of whether or not plans exist to develop a formal police-probation partnership “program,” police departments and community corrections agencies may find it generally desirable to develop a strategic

plan for reducing the potential risks associated with episodic and unstructured interagency collaboration.

Such a plan, of course, requires the systematic identification and evaluation of the potential unanticipated consequences that threaten the occurrence of negative outcomes associated with these partnerships. The following discussion identifies some of the documented consequences associated with Spokane's police-probation partnership. Recommendations for managing these consequences are included for the benefit of the officers involved in the program and their respective agency administrators responsible for program oversight.

Mission Creep

Police-probation partnerships are likely to result in an expansion of the roles of participating officers--a phenomenon known in the organizational studies literature as *mission creep* (Corbett 1998). This study revealed that mission creep assumes a variety of forms and affects individual officers in different ways. For example, merely finding ways of working together (and *reasons* for doing so) required police and probation officers alike to make a noteworthy initial investment in terms of energy and time. One police officer pointed out, for example, that it takes time for a sense of camaraderie to develop among partnership participants:

We're slowly but surely figuring it out—yeah, it's a trust issue that we're all on the same team (respondent #506).

As the first step toward reaching out to one another, officers needed to educate one another about their roles, principal objectives, and the limits of their authority. Several officers described the importance of this, with three police officers summarizing their sentiments as follows:

Knowing where their lines [in terms of authority] are and what their guidelines are is hard for us to understand (respondent #504)

You can learn to know each other to make [the partnership] work. Otherwise, you're butting heads with each other trying to figure out "well, I can't do this and you can't do this, and where can we meet in the middle out here?" (respondent #509).

...[probation officers have] taught me...what their agency can't do—they've drawn those lines for me because I've been willing to talk to them. And just catching them—you know, is hard enough, because they're as busy as I am. So, [working in a COPS-Shop] was a huge eye-opener education-wise (respondent #506)

This is a type of mission creep that is largely unavoidable, but it is in the interests of the partnering agencies to expedite and systematize this process through a joint officer training program. The learn-as-you-go method, as experienced by the officers involved in this partnership, is inefficient and presents the risk of producing inconsistent outcomes.

Further, working in the decentralized community setting of neighborhood COPS-Shops (where residents often walk in off the street) required the partnership participants to become involved in an array of activities that are not expected of their traditional counterparts, ranging from the many responsibilities associated with working more directly with the public to tasks such as routine office maintenance and janitorial duties⁴.

Officers provided several examples in the following comments:

We did a lot of things out of [my COPS-Shop] that weren't really criminal in nature, but they were issues that were problems that were affecting the neighborhood. Whether it be garbage, whether it be junk cars, whether it be neighborhood disputes, whether it be problems in the park with something. You kind of got to go outside—if you are going to [work out of a COPS-Shop]--- you've got to go outside the scope of the traditional [probation officer] duties and responsibilities and be willing to take on some other things (respondent #114).

Not many people understand how slam-dunked you can get [in a COPS-Shop]...I have them [neighborhood residents] coming in both doors sometimes and I kind of feel like I'm getting buried alive (respondent #501).

We do a lot of things that aren't in my CQs [classification questionnaire], you know, under my job description. I make the coffee every day. On Tuesdays I roll out the garbage, you know. I am very good about that, you know, and somebody's got to do it. Just those kinds of things that are just so different from what we grew up with (respondent #105).

[Working out of a COPS-Shop] can get overwhelming. They [residents] really suck you in because they want their own personal policeman. And so they can really suck you in (respondent #505).

I'm considered part of the COPS-Shop, so anybody that comes in off the street, I go greet, meet, and talk to (respondent #102).

Of course, expanding the traditional roles of police officers and probation officers is what police-probation partnerships are designed to facilitate. Maximizing the utility of these partnerships, however, requires that the roles of police officers and probation officers be expanded in ways that are conducive to *increasing* rather than decreasing their effectiveness. The officers involved in this study routinely complained that the partnership, with its decentralized officer deployment scheme which is designed to co-locate and promote daily interaction between officers, actually *restricted* their ability to make the kinds of improvements in offender supervision that the partnership was designed to foster. Interview data reveal that these officers were constantly burdened and often overwhelmed with unconventional duties. The following comments offer several examples, each of which indicates that officers were not provided with clear mission statements prior to participating in the partnership.

[When you are working out of a COPS-Shop] you're either going to get sucked in all the way or you're going to be just totally inadequate because you don't know where to start (respondent #511).

[T]here are things that come up that are added duties beyond your caseload that you go, “man, I feel like I should do this to continue in this partnership.” You know, you feel like its part of it, but it does add an extra duty. It creates stress, but you know, you don’t feel like you are really getting compensated for it real well in terms of the time or the caseload (respondent #111).

[Working out of a COPS-Shop] you are always “what can I do? How can I solve this? I need to get this taken care of.” You never, ever let it go—and it takes a toll on you... (respondent #503).

Our job is to assist [the public] in solving problems, basically. Whatever that might be. If it’s cleaning up the alley with garbage, if it’s, you know, helping some elderly person change a filter in their furnace, whatever it is, whatever it might be (respondent #111)

[Policing] is a stressful job, so you have to draw a line, and that line got all fuzzy when I took this job (respondent #506).

Every officer expressed frustration with various tasks associated with working out of COPS-Shops and complained that they reduced (to, in some cases, the point of nearly eliminating) the time they could devote to accomplishing their respective law enforcement and offender supervision objectives. Clearly, then, there are at least two forms of mission creep to consider when planning for and/or evaluating police-probation partnerships. First, some changes, such as maintaining the COPS-Shops, constitute a kind of job creep that might best be referred to as “bad” mission creep. These changes actually interfere with the efforts of officers to engage in other “good” forms of mission creep: those that involve the development of more effective and innovative policing and offender supervision strategies.

Based on these observations, successful implementation of a police-probation partnership appears to require proper management of the factors associated with mission creep. To begin, it is essential to distinguish between productive and counterproductive forms of mission creep. Most police-probation partnerships are designed to allow, even

encourage, police and probation officers to expand their roles in ways that contribute to the effectiveness of the two agencies to provide public safety and facilitate offender reentry/reintegration. Accommodating this type of mission creep is necessary in order for these partnerships to achieve their potential. On the other hand, when interagency partnerships require officers to assume added duties which undermine their effectiveness, counterproductive forms of mission creep will be experienced. Maximizing the potential of these partnerships depends on the ability of field supervisors and upper-level managers to control and direct mission creep in ways that convert it from a liability into a resource.

Mission Distortion

This study revealed that police-probation partnerships have the potential to place probation officers in a position where their professional mission (or role) orientation becomes blurry. A probation officer explains:

I think the [probation officers] can –they tend to get too law enforcement oriented in their thinking. That’s my personal opinion, and I’ve seen that happen. Because we’re not cops. We can play a cop role when we need to, but that’s not our main role at all, and I can see that as being a negative. There are some boundary issues that have a tendency to get crossed if, you know, you are constantly working with the police...Just little things like that—you become too much of a cop if you are with a cop all day [laughing] (respondent #114).

The community corrections officers interviewed and observed for this study reported experiencing this--a phenomenon referred to as *mission distortion* in the organizational studies literature. For example, as a result of actively working with the police, several of these officers reported feeling that they were expected (by their law enforcement counterparts) to emphasize aggressive enforcement priorities at the expense of their service and mentoring obligations. These probation officers pointed out that

police officers typically emphasize *arrest* as the preferred method for achieving the goal of public safety.

Interviews and observations of the participating police officers confirmed this as a common perception. A majority of the police officers interviewed made it clear that they measured the utility of the partnership largely (and, in some cases, exclusively) in terms of improving their ability to take “bad guys” off the streets. In other words, in the context of this partnership, police officers viewed probation officers as resources (or, as some police officers put it, as “tools,” as seen in quotes cited below) in their quest to improve public safety via arrest by, for instance, providing police officers with improved intelligence and access to probationers. The following comments provide examples of these sentiments.

[Police officers] like working with us [probation officers]...we can go into an offender’s home without a search warrant. They can’t (respondent #102).

[Probation officers] are great for going into a house and doing a search of a person who’s on probation to make sure that there’s no drugs going on or there’s not some other type of crime that might be happening. And we [alone] can’t do that (respondent #503).

...[police officers] like the advantage of using us [probation officers] because they may have somebody in a house that they want and they can’t go in, but we have somebody in that house on supervision. And guess what? We CAN go in. We just knock and walk (respondent #115).

[Probationers] have no rights with DOC. With us, we still have all the Amendments we’ve got to—they have rights. But when [probation officers] go in, [probationers] don’t really have any rights, so they can go in and search anywhere (respondent #505).

...the tremendous power [probation officers] have to walk into somebody’s house and say “what’s going on?” I can be their “buddy” so to speak...so they’re a tremendous *tool* (respondent #501, emphasis added).

[The benefits of partnering with probation officers are], I think, just being able to access who their offenders are and [find out] what their restrictions are. And then

having them as a *tool* to get into their houses that we wouldn't otherwise be able to access for people (respondent #504, emphasis added).

What is especially troubling is that the officers involved in this partnership placed virtually no emphasis on how police officers might assist probation officers to more effectively manage the offender reintegration process.

Of particular concern is the potential for police-probation partnerships to place probation officers in positions to serve as “Stalking Horses” for police officers. Stalking Horse incidents constitute a type of noble cause corruption (Crank and Caldero 2000) and arise when probation officers are used by police officers to gain access to the homes of probationers without a search warrant. A probation officer describes the phenomenon as follows:

...the case law refers to it as the Stalking Horse case, and that is, basically, that on occasion...overzealous police officers could use a [probation officer] to get into a residence, for example to do a search. And a lot of those cases have been thrown out in the past because...they are using the authority of the [probation officer] with the waiver of Fourth Amendment search and seizure [protections] to get into a dwelling and observe, you know, what's going on there (respondent #111).

Police officers are generally legally permitted to accompany probation officers on routine warrantless home visits so long as the police officer acts as an agent (and under the direction) of the probation officer and so long as the search is conducted for *probationary* purposes. However, when the actions of probation officers are guided or directed by police officers and/or when these joint field visits are conducted for *law enforcement* purposes, they constitute warrantless and, potentially, illegal searches. Such abuses have, allegedly, resulted from a joint police-probation program in New York City (see Burrell 1999).

In order to achieve community corrections goals, probation officers have always faced the challenge of balancing the dual goals of offender supervision and offender reintegration. Police-probation partnerships have the potential to place additional pressures on probation officers, making this balance even more difficult to establish, much less maintain. Field supervisors and upper-level managers must be sensitive to this and take steps to prevent partnerships from producing outcomes such as Stalking Horse incidents. Even when precautionary steps are taken, these partnerships threaten to cause some probation officers to seek the acceptance of their police partners by engaging in aggressive enforcement tactics at the expense of addressing probationer community reintegration needs. In order for probation to serve as an effective (and credible) alternative to imprisonment, offenders must have a reasonable chance at successful reintegration. Put simply, mission distortion has the potential to distract officers from this all-important objective. Therefore, it is essential that field supervisors monitor partnership participants to make certain that probation officers remain committed to a balanced set of objectives.

In Spokane, there is a noticeable absence of comprehensive guidelines for officers to follow when carrying out their duties as individuals and as partnership participants. The vast majority of the officers interviewed for this study expressed confusion about the boundaries of their respective legal authority. Responsibility for this confusion rests with program administrators. In order to minimize the impact of mission distortion, it is critical for any agency involved in a similar partnership to provide specialized training designed to prepare officers for the challenges and obstacles outlined above.

Organizational Lag

Maximizing the potential of police-probation partnerships is an extremely complicated and sensitive process that requires organizational leaders to accommodate the unique demands that the partnership places on officers. Unresponsiveness on the part of agency leaders results in the phenomenon of *organizational lag* and severely limits the ability of officers to achieve agency goals.

The probation officers participating in Spokane's partnership identified *excessive caseload size* as the most significant obstacle to their ability to participate effectively in their partnership with the police. Each of the probation officers involved in this partnership complained about their large caseloads and they each believed that their caseload burden interfered with their ability seek more creative approaches to their work (through collaborative partnerships or otherwise). The following comment is a typical expression of officer sentiments:

We're extremely overloaded. It's extremely difficult to see all of [our probationer clients]. Most of us are not getting our field [visit] requirements in...I can complain here for three hours, believe me...it is just chaos...with the caseloads that we have, I think they are setting us up for failure (respondent #106).

In simple terms, large caseloads severely limit the time probation officers have to work with the police on joint problem-solving ventures.

Additionally, the *location* of caseload assignments has an impact on the ability of probation officers to develop effective partnerships with the police. In order to promote the goals associated with co-locating probation officers with police officers in the neighborhood setting, probation officers were initially promised caseloads primarily comprised of offenders who resided in or near the vicinity of the COPS-Shop to which each officer was assigned. Actual caseload assignments, however, failed to correspond to

these geographic areas for nearly half of the probation officers involved in the partnership. This created frustrated conditions for many officers. A probation officer explains:

My partner and I do half [of our caseload in another neighborhood] and half here. [The] office in that community wants to know why we're not up there more. We always say "hey...we're doing the best we can..." but then there's some people [here] who say "well, why aren't you full time here?" We're kind of split in two and it's hard to please everyone because you're giving half your time to the other community (respondent #107).

The police department also failed to fully commit the neighborhood deployment scheme by assigning some officers to more than one COPS-Shop. By being forced so split their time between two COPS-Shops, these police officers also found themselves split between multiple probation officer partners, making it virtually impossible to cultivate a meaningful relationship with any of them.

These practices contradict the goals of the partnership, distract officers from focusing on a single, *shared*, "home" neighborhood, and severely limit their ability to establish regular, predictable street-level work routines—each of which should be viewed as a prerequisite to becoming a contributing partnership member.

Finally, the police and probation officers involved in this partnership reported that being deployed in a decentralized manner (related to being stationed in the COPS-Shops) afforded them with unprecedented levels of personal discretion.

I couldn't ever ask for more discretion. I mean, nobody questions me on how I do my job (respondent #507).

Basically, in the COPS-Shops, you're on your own (respondent #108).

...There's a lot of anonymity in the COPS-Shops. We can basically do whatever we want (respondent #115).

...as a [police officer in a COPS-Shop] you're out here on your own, on the end of your string out here (respondent #509).

...you have so much flexibility and so much discretion. If you didn't have integrity, there are so many ways to abuse the system (respondent #507).

...like my [supervisor] says, "do your 40 hours, make your neighborhood happy, and you won't hear from me." That's a tremendous amount of freedom in a job so available to misguided rogues. It would be easy to do all sorts of bad stuff up here and nobody would ever know until one little thing goes wrong and the whole world comes crashing down on you (respondent #501).

Vastly expanding the discretionary authority of officers appears to create the conditions which make possible, among other things, the potential mission distortion problems outlined above. Admittedly, expanding the discretionary decision-making powers of officers is widely viewed as necessary for purposes of equipping them with the ability to engage in cooperative community-specific problem solving activities. Yet police-probation partnerships expand the coercive power of officers (by *combining* the coercive powers at the disposal of police officers with those available to probation officers), resulting in an *increased* rather than a decreased need for officer supervision. Officers who work in a decentralized setting (e.g., COPS-Shops) create a set of unique challenges for field supervisors because these officers are typically unable to attend daily unit meetings, roll calls, or to otherwise have routine contact with their supervisors. These circumstances demonstrate the importance of (when implementing a partnership program coupled with a decentralized officer deployment scheme) modifying oversight mechanisms (or developing new ones) that, at a very minimum, provide officers with feedback and guidance sufficient for purposes of limiting civil liability risks and preventing violations of probationers' rights.

Discussion

The importance of this evaluation of police-probation partnerships is confirmed by the fact that these types of collaborative working relationships are expanding in communities across the country. Even where there is an absence of a *formal* program designed to promote such a partnership, police-probation collaboration is, in one form or another, seemingly inevitable. As both law enforcement and probation agencies move toward engaging in community oriented practices and attempt to close gaps in communications networks, they will be encouraged and expected to develop closer working relationships with one another. Put simply, partnerships offer so much potential to improve officer efficiency, agency effectiveness, and public safety that community-based police officers and community-based probation officers will naturally seek new and improved opportunities to collaborate.

Acknowledging this, it is prudent for both probation agencies and local police departments to recognize the factors that threaten to undermine the success of these interagency partnerships or discredit them altogether. The first and perhaps most important step toward reducing the potential for unanticipated problems is to formalize these relationships via agency recognition and supervision of collaborative activities. Additional specific measures range from liberating probation officers from excessive caseload burdens to developing new training programs to improving field oversight and officer accountability mechanisms. These findings, although preliminary and offered with the usual cautions and caveats, are intended to be of assistance to agencies interested in taking this first step. These suggestions are designed to inform the decisions of line officers, field supervisors, mid-level managers, and policy-makers alike as they attempt

to address the unintended consequences associated with mission creep, mission distortion, and organizational lag associated with the evolution of police-probation collaboration.

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