

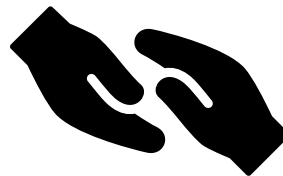
REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY

DESIGNING A REIMAGINED SYSTEM

Models from the Field – Community Service Officers

Many police departments employ community service officers (CSOs), or non-sworn professionals who respond to non-emergent community issues such as traffic control, vandalism, special events, and report taking. CSOs typically are unarmed and, unlike police officers, rarely empowered to make arrests or use force.

The rationale for CSOs is straightforward: some community issues, needs, and calls for service require attention, but are unlikely to involve imminent threats of harm to individuals. Professionals with appropriate training and expertise can address these issues as effectively – or more effectively – than armed police officers.



In addition to expanding and diversifying a jurisdiction's response options, CSOs also can help free up the time and attention of sworn officers so that they can focus more intently on core responsibilities related to physical safety.

Real World Models

The Community Service Officer Program in San Jose, CA responds to low-level calls for service throughout the city, such as missing persons, abandoned vehicles, petty theft, and other issues that are unlikely to implicate an immediate threat of harm to persons. CSOs attend an 8-week academy and deploy every day of the week. They are armed with pepper spray, but no other weapons. The unit was established in 2014 and employs more than 70 officers.

The Community Service Officers in Virginia Beach, VA respond primarily to issues occurring on the roadway. Among other duties, they direct traffic at crash scenes, assist with disabled vehicles, and conduct parking enforcement – tasks that are important for community safety, but are unlikely to implicate immediate threats of physical harm.

The police department in Eugene, Oregon employs its Community Service Officers to manage non-emergency calls for service and support other public safety duties, such as taking missing person reports and responding to post-incident burglaries. The department currently budgets for 24 full-time CSO positions.

Some municipalities are considering an expansion of CSO duties to encompass safety issues that are more emergent. For example, in July 2021 Seattle announced that it was working to specialize its triage system to dispatch CSOs to welfare checks that are unrelated to criminal or legal concerns.

If CSOs are already operating within your public safety system, consider examining their current responsibilities and evaluating the feasibility of adding additional call types to their duties.



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