

# Community prosecution in the United States

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Since the early 1990s the movement toward community policing has sparked a similar interest on the part of the prosecutor (Gramckow, 1995b; Jacoby et al., 1995; DiIulio, 1992). Prosecutors throughout the US developed a variety of community oriented responses sometimes in conjunction with community policing, sometimes independent of it (Gramckow, 1995a). These efforts span the range from simple organizational adjustments in response to community policing to assuming a proactive role in working with the community to assure neighbourhood safety (Jacoby et al., 1995; APRI, 1995).

The different models of community prosecution efforts established in the US make it difficult to describe what community prosecution actually means and what it looks like. Just as police created different forms of community policing (Rosenbaum, 1986; Greene and Taylor, 1988; Skogan, 1990; BJA, 1994), prosecutors have established programmes that reflect the needs of their own jurisdictions. Few prosecutors opted for decentralization of the entire office (e.g. Montgomery County, MD, Kings County, NY) with various successes. Some created special units (e.g. Portland, OR, Indianapolis, IN) or focused on special types of crime (e.g. Middlesex County [Cambridge], MA; APRI, 1994). In other jurisdictions the efforts created are not defined as 'community prosecution' but nevertheless represent the core of this approach by involving community members and other organizations in identifying community problems and developing co-ordinated responses to solve these problems (e.g. Kansas City, MO, Baltimore City, MD).

The jurisdictions that are experimenting with this different concept range from large metropolitan areas (e.g. Chicago, IL, Brooklyn, NY, Boston, MA, Baltimore, MD) to mid-size cities (e.g. Portland, OR) and suburban and rural counties (e.g. Howard County, MD). Interestingly, even some US Attorneys Offices (USAO) are establishing efforts to work closer with the communities

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they serve. For example, the USAO in Washington, DC, is closely working with communities and other agencies to identify property that is used for drug sales and instead of simply arresting and prosecuting those who use the property for buying and selling drugs, hold the owners responsible for the illicit activities. The focus of the office on housing abatements was a promising approach to quickly impact troubled neighbourhoods.

While community orientation has been firmly established in approximately a dozen prosecutors offices throughout the US, many more are currently developing such efforts or are interested in learning more about its requirements and value. Despite this growing interest the percentage of offices that are currently practising community oriented efforts is minimal considering that close to 2,850 prosecutors offices exist throughout the US.

One reason for this limited implementation of an otherwise widely praised concept is that most prosecutors serve in jurisdictions and offices that are far too small to allow for the development of a special effort that is separate from all other work: 1,251 US prosecutors serve jurisdictions with populations ranging up to 20,000; 671 serve populations between 20,000 and 50,000. Another reason is, however, the limited understanding of what community prosecution actually means for prosecutors' offices, how it differs from traditional prosecution and what changes in policies, management, organization, and resources it requires.

Considering the wide range of organizational models currently applied (i.e. complete decentralization, special programmes, focus on a few neighbourhoods, focus on special crime issues) it is easy to understand why practitioners may find it difficult to understand the concept of community prosecution and how this relates to traditional prosecution activities.

A closer look at these efforts reveals, however, that there are a number of factors they all share. First and foremost, these prosecutors no longer focus on just processing cases that are brought to their attention. They recognise that criminal procedures alone do little to break the cycle of crime and violence. *Instead, people feel safer and criminal activity declines when a neighbourhood's quality of life improves.* By paying attention to less serious violations – such as vandalism, littering and loitering – prosecutors assist their communities in creating safer neighbourhoods. To reduce the onset of crime prosecutors also reach out to schools with drug education, engage in truancy prevention efforts, develop programmes to reduce hate crimes, and co-ordinate youth activities (Gramckow, 1997; McLaughlin and Billiant, 1997).

Second, in their efforts to redefine their role to assure community safety by including prevention and education as part of their mission, prosecutors become problem solvers (Goldstock, 1991). That is, they focus on identifying specific problem areas (e.g. type of crime, geographic distribution, offender

type) and develop alternative approaches to solve these problems. And third, prosecutors work closely with the community and other agencies and organizations in identifying problems and finding solutions that include traditional criminal justice responses but more often focus on alternative modes to resolve conflict and prevent the occurrence of crime in the first place (Coles and Earle, 1997).

### What is different?

Considering the fact that the prosecutor in the US is an elected official charged with upholding law and order in a jurisdiction these three factors do not appear to divert greatly from the traditional role of a prosecutor. As a result many practitioners find it difficult to understand what it is that makes community prosecution different from their traditional work and that it may require changes in policy, management, organization, and resources.

In the past, community outreach and involvement have been part of many prosecutor offices already. As elected officials, prosecutors in the US regularly communicate with the public – their constituency – and participate in numerous civic, educational and prevention efforts. Especially the work of Victim/Witness Assistance Units brought the offices closer to working with different sections of the community and other agencies. Also, special federally funded enforcement and prevention programmes that focused on individual problem neighbourhoods, such as Weed and Seed and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA), involved the prosecutor not only in co-ordinated enforcement efforts but in prevention work.

Geographic assignments and decentralization *per se* are not just a trait of community oriented efforts. Large jurisdictions, such as San Diego, established satellite offices years ago because it was organizationally more sound to locate prosecutors throughout the city close to the different courts they were working in. Other offices gained some experience with geographic assignments as part of their Weed and Seed or HIDTA activities. The US Attorney's Office in Washington, DC, for example, tracked all narcotics and violent crime cases in the designated Weed and Seed area and a team of assistants had the responsibility of prosecuting organisers of gangs operating in this specific subsection of the city.

What makes community prosecution different from all these other efforts is that prosecutors and their assistants not only listen to the community, but that crime and order problems in specific geographic areas are identified in co-operation with the community and other government agencies and that problem solutions are developed that go beyond the traditional criminal responses of arrest and prosecution (Gramckow, 1997; APRI, 1995).

### What are the requirements?

Since community orientation among prosecutors is a phenomenon that only began in the early 1990s information about these efforts is scant. However, the few reports – published and unpublished – that are available point to a number of changes that need to be implemented and considered if an office wants to embrace a community oriented approach. In general, changes are needed in the organization, management, policy, processes, and resources of an office. However, the changes actually required in an office depend on the scope and focus the new effort takes.

#### *Organizational changes*

As already mentioned, the offices that developed a community oriented approach in the US developed different models to apply this new concept. Only a few actually decentralized their entire office and there are also variations in decentralization. The prosecutor in Montgomery County, MD, for example, assigned in 1992 all prosecutors to five different geographic areas that reflected the police districts and abolished all special units. The intent was to let the assistant prosecutors work in teams only on cases that came out of their assigned area. The assistants were charged with communicating with community members, police and other agencies to develop appropriate responses to the crimes that occurred in these areas, to identify undetected problems and to communicate about feasible responses. The prosecutor in Kings County (Brooklyn, NY) on the other hand assigned his assistants to different trial zones that were established to reflect an equal mix and volume of cases for all zones.

The effort in Montgomery County proved to be too ambitious for the office. Police complained that prosecutors with special expertise in complex cases were not equally available to all districts, courts did not co-operate well in letting individual prosecutors work on cases resulting from their assigned district only, and a considerable number of assistant prosecutors were uncomfortable with working closely with community members on issues, such as graffiti and abandoned cars, when they saw their role in charging and prosecuting felons. As a result, when the chief prosecutor resigned to become a judge, his successor reverted the geographic assignment and limited the community orientated work. The efforts in Brooklyn, on the other hand, continue on, even though this office too had to struggle with some of the same problems Montgomery County went through, especially with gaining support from the courts to assure that the geographic concentration remained intact. The experiences of Montgomery County and Brooklyn show that community

prosecution requires increased co-ordination with the courts especially when the prosecutor pursues geographic assignments for the assistants. Without the co-operation of the judiciary, the programme can topple. The office has to make sure that an assistant working in one district will not be assigned by a judge to try a case in another district (Jacoby and Gramckow, 1993).

Most prosecutors' offices that apply some form of community orientation have opted for a much smaller scope than a transition for the entire office. They instead established special units that either focus on a specific neighbourhood or a certain type of crime. This nevertheless requires co-ordination with the courts to assure that assistants can focus on the cases stemming from the selected geographic area only. As outlined in more detail below, the development of a special unit carries its own problems but is more promising as an initial step to test this new approach and slowly introduce the changes needed.

The experiences in Brooklyn and Montgomery County on the other hand also indicated that decentralization provides a number of benefits including but not limited to increased flexibility in services; a reduction in the need for specialists or special units; increased accountability for case processing; increased communication and co-ordination between law enforcement and prosecutors; increases on the job training experience for younger assistants; and last but not least, support of and access to the community.

#### *Management changes*

When an office decides to embark on community prosecution, a number of management adjustments have to be undertaken. If offices decentralize, care must be taken to ensure that prosecution services are delivered uniformly and consistently throughout the communities, especially if the neighbourhoods differ by population and crime. Although these issues are similar to those experienced by prosecutors who direct offices with several branches such as San Diego, Detroit or Kansas City, it may pose problems initially to prosecutors who are not familiar with the special policy control and management procedures needed to ensure uniformity and consistency in prosecution.

If a special unit is created it has to be assured that the unit is still viewed and functions as part of the office and not as a separate entity. Staff assigned to such a special unit should not be viewed as having to deal solely with lower level crimes and neighbourhood concerns. Especially early on in the development many prosecutors view an assignment to such work as 'social work' that does not measure up to 'real' prosecutor work. This bias can be avoided if only the best and most dedicated assistants gain the privilege to work in this unit. Making sure that new prosecutors are at least rotated through the unit to

develop an understanding for this type of assignment is also helpful. Carefully selecting the right staff to lead the community efforts is important. Not only does this assignment require good communication skills and the ability to work independently without detailed guidelines, but it requires flexibility and creativity to work with the community and develop adequate alternative responses. To assure that assistants can function in the community they have to have the discretion – they need to be empowered – to make decisions about the appropriate response on their own. This requirement is an issue that some chief prosecutors are struggling with. Just as some police chiefs and officers have been sceptical about dispersing power and exposing individual officers to the community (Weisburg and Hardyman, 1987), some prosecutors are reluctant to let assistants work closely with a community and thereby develop their own political ‘power base’. This concern may not be of high importance in a European system where the prosecutors are civil servants. In the US, however, where chief prosecutors are elected, allowing assistants to develop their own constituency may not only have the potential for creating conflicting centres of political influence in a jurisdiction but may mean providing a future contender with the means to win the next election.

#### *Policy changes*

Closely related to adjusting the management style, and probably the most important change required by community orientation, is that the emphasis on quality of life issues and prevention points to a change in prosecutorial priority.

The shift in focus to community needs and problems often requires responses that differ from existing prosecutorial priorities. The solution of a community problem may be expedited by a swift and harsh prosecution of a minor crime – one that normally would have received scant attention and a plea bargained sentence or dismissal. The priorities of the community, in these instances, may conflict with those of the prosecutor. Additionally, the prosecutor may have to accept the fact that not all cases that traditionally would go to trial do so or, that less serious cases might require more prosecutor and court attention than usual. It may be necessary to realign existing charging and plea bargaining policies with the community’s needs.

Also, the more proactive the prosecutor becomes, the more he is engaged in non-traditional activities, building partnerships with other agencies, developing preventive measures and alternatives to formal criminal justice procedures, the more his role as an independent prosecutor and his accountability to the community become indistinct. Prosecutors have to assure that the community oriented work is nevertheless balanced, that all sections of the

community are represented and protected equally, that the rule of law remains the guiding standard for prosecutorial activities. The rule of law can be viewed as the ultimate limit for community oriented prosecution. The work has to remain within legal limits and follow legal standards. It is not the purpose of community oriented prosecution to provide only one section of the community with access to justice, to let them dictate the outcome and results of prosecutorial priorities and decisions. Community orientation can occur within the margin of discretion as long as it is applied equally and just (Gramckow, 1995a).

#### *Resource needs*

Studies of community policing (Moore, 1992; Spelman and Eck, 1989; Trojanowicz, 1982) often point to the need for additional resources. An assessment undertaken by the Jefferson Institute also pointed to a potential resource impact in prosecutors' offices (Jacoby et al., 1995). The emphasis on quality of life crimes such as loitering, public nuisances, and graffiti generally is in stark contrast to the traditional priorities of prosecution that focuses on murders, assaults, robberies and drugs. Such change in prosecutorial emphasis can impact on the office's resources and impede the prosecution of other cases.

All sites that developed community prosecution efforts experienced or expected changes in workloads. Adding crime prevention and community involvement to the work of prosecutors means adding activities to regular duties resulting from cases filed with the office. Defining the community, identifying the needs of all sections of the population and businesses, and balancing office needs are basic problems in every community oriented strategy. Financing the different activities related to a community oriented strategy, reallocation of resources cannot mean cutting funds for felony prosecutions. It can be argued that community prosecution's emphasis on diverting cases from the formal process will mean that resources spent for prevention and alternative responses result in savings for formal prosecution. This is, however, only likely to occur in the long run and will not reduce resource needs initially. One benefit of community oriented work is, however, that alternative sources for funding other than the office budget may be available (e.g. community volunteers; staff, office space and equipment shared with other agencies; private donations). However, the question of having commercial groups pay for prosecutors or the more general one of privatizing services may be troublesome to some prosecutors.

### Why engage in community prosecution?

Considering the fact that community orientation in a prosecutor's office requires considerable adjustments the question arises why to engage in this effort in the first place. Just as police chiefs and officers have been sceptical about the benefits of decreasing central power, exposing individual officers to the influence of community groups and the requirement of different police activities (Weisburg and Hardyman, 1987), prosecutors may be opposed to these new efforts. At the same time many prosecutors are intrigued by the benefits that community based law enforcement and adjudication programmes appear to present. Community oriented services provide them with an opportunity to strengthen public relations; to educate the public about areas of criminal justice largely unknown to them; and to foster a closer working relationship between their agency, the police, local business communities, schools, and civic organizations (Gramckow, 1994; Gramckow, 1993).

While community prosecution increases the accessibility of the office to the public, this is not an uncommon experience even for traditionally structured offices that maintain victim assistance programmes or citizen complaint bureaux. However, community prosecution offers the opportunity for opening the office to a broader community and making the criminal justice system (via the prosecutor) more user friendly and more responsive. Also, assistant prosecutors that are familiar with the neighbourhood cases stem from, are generally better informed about the actual case background and can better understand the impact the criminal act and the criminal justice response have on the individual offender, the victim, and the neighbourhood. Community members that have the opportunity to observe and learn about the work of the prosecutor gain a better understanding of the limits of criminal justice interventions and can become actively involved in finding alternative responses or support the prosecutor in his work. As a result community members develop a better sense of the criminal justice system, feel that they are an active part of the process and begin to develop more trust in the system (Jacoby and Gramckow, 1993).

In addition, the increased focus on developing alternative response mechanisms in conjunction with others have the potential to reduce the need for formal criminal justice intervention and thereby, while adding new activities to the responsibility of prosecutors, potentially reducing the volume of cases that have to be handled within the formal system. An example from Portland, OR, can illustrate this point. One of the newest attractions for teenagers in one neighbourhood in Portland is a skateboard park. Where only months ago a



property, the same young people are now enjoying their acrobatic sport, patrolling the area and keeping the compound clean. Built with the help of the same manufacturer, the skateboard park is a result of an agreement between teenagers, local business and government agencies, a co-operation that was initiated and facilitated by the local prosecutor (Gramckow, 1997). Like the District Attorney in Portland, OR many prosecutors in the US are currently rethinking their roles and pay increased attention to crime prevention and alternative measures to create safer neighbourhoods. These prosecutors recognise that criminal procedures alone do little to break the cycle of violence and that citizens feel safer and criminal activity can be reduced when the quality of life in a neighbourhood is improved (Eck and Spelman, 1987; Goldstein, 1987). In most jurisdictions community prosecution is still experimental, but those few jurisdictions that have had the time to recognise the benefits of this approach are faring very well. In Portland, Oregon community prosecution has been implemented first in the early 1990s and today has become a household term. Here the prosecutors not only work closely with the community, some of them are even located directly in different neighbourhoods. This approach receives substantial support from the communities. Actually the first prosecutor working out of a neighbourhood office was funded by a business community.

The movement toward community prosecution has taken prosecutors beyond the limits of the criminal law. They engage in drug education in schools, coordinate projects to develop alternative activities for juveniles, and apply civil sanctions and city statutes to rid communities of crack houses. While community orientation and problem solving approaches involve prosecutors in a range of unusual activities they are nevertheless focusing on reducing crime and creating safer neighbourhoods – goals that are a natural part of a prosecutor's mandate.

The more proactive prosecutors become, the more they are engaged in non-traditional activities such as building partnerships with other public and private agencies, and developing preventive measures and alternatives to formal criminal justice procedures. All these efforts can improve the satisfaction of a victim and the broader community which is important in itself, especially at times where community satisfaction with government is low and sliding.

### **Redefining the prosecutor's role**

The experiences made by the few innovative prosecutors in the US who embarked on community prosecution show that these efforts require some changes in the structure of the office and reallocation of resources. In addi-

tion, it may well be that staff with different skills is needed and the proactive approach of these offices requires some data and information collection that is usually not available in a prosecutor's office.

More important than any logistic consideration, however, is the question if prosecutors want to assume such a role. Some may argue that it would be presumptuous for them to take a prominent role in crime prevention and community problem solving. Other agencies, such as the police, the courts, schools, and child welfare are responsible for such efforts. Even if it is true that cleaning up an overgrown vacant lot will reduce crime, is it not for the sanitation or parks department to take action? If the expansion of community services is desirable, is it not for probation to consider such change? While it may be that such activities by the prosecutor are seen as meddling in other agencies' fields the heads of these agencies may find that the prosecutor can be a powerful ally in aiding them to fortify the social institutions over which they have primary jurisdiction (Goldstock, 1991).

Because prosecutors in the US are currently basically developing or experimenting with this new strategy, the role of the prosecutor in these efforts has not yet been clearly defined and the limits of its influence on community affairs have not yet been established. It appears that prosecutorial responses may be affected by the type of community policing philosophy adopted by law enforcement agencies. But at the same time prosecutors have adopted their own community related philosophy independent of the police. As an elected official, the prosecutor has the power to 'sell' alternative, non-traditional responses to the public, enlist other government agencies in this community effort, and educate judges about the importance of a case to the community. Actually, the more traditional a prosecutor generally is, the less likely is it that community prosecution is accused of being just 'soft on crime' and the more likely the co-operation of other agencies and a broader section of the community.

At the same time some questions arise about the boundaries of prosecutorial involvement with the community. The issue of a prosecutor receiving funds from private individuals or organizations is one that requires clear policy statements and direction as well as clear understanding of what the private groups or organizations can expect as a result of their support. In response prosecutors in Portland and Colorado Springs developed protocols for co-operation with private security and other non-government entities. Today most jurisdictions design and provide their community oriented services for areas of activity that have few guidelines and require additional interpretation.

### What are the effects?

While there is little systematic information available on the impact of community prosecution on the office, other agencies and the targeted neighbourhoods, it has been reported that the same issues have surfaced and similar outcomes can be expected in community prosecution as they have in community policing.

First, a number of effects on agency operations can be noted. These programmes have the potential to change the nature of work flowing through the criminal justice system and the demand for criminal justice services. In general, it can be noted that there is a sequence to caseload activity. Initially, when the office concentrates on a problem, cleans up areas, and gains citizens' trust, the number of lower level cases handled rises. Increases are generally experienced with respect to misdemeanour and ordinance cases. Costs and problems may be reduced in one area only to be shifted to another. Unclear is whether the introduction of different activities, such as attending community meetings or creating new diversion strategies requires an increase in positions for prosecutors and support staff.

Most offices experienced increases especially in the use of citations, misdemeanours and ordinance violations, triggered by the community's call for enforcement of quality of life issues. By emphasizing crime prevention and problem solving, community oriented prosecution may increase the need for procedures to handle dispute resolution, diversion, treatment, intermediate sanctions and other non-traditional sanctioning responses.

If the prosecutor, other criminal justice agencies and the community work together effectively, their efforts may impact on the caseloads of not only all criminal justice agencies but also of civil (or administrative) courts and other state and local government agencies that provide services essential to improving the quality of life in neighbourhoods (e.g. housing and zoning, parks and recreation, sanitation, youth services).

Prosecutors who established community prosecution efforts generally stress the positive impact on the neighbourhoods they are working in and on working relationships with other parts of the criminal justice system. However, at this point, it is not possible to categorically state whether or not these new approaches to prosecution are worthwhile, which impact they ultimately have on traditional prosecutorial operations or on other criminal justice agencies. This lack of information is partially due to the fact that the measures typically applied (e.g. the number of prosecutions completed, active prosecutions, indictments received, defendants charged, defendants found/plead guilty, etcetera) do not reflect the community oriented work. In community policing, police performance is generally evaluated by a different set of criteria than

traditionally employed. Police departments correctly want to divert evaluation measures away from the number of tickets, arrests, or responses and include calls for services and beat patrol activities to determine the extent of community contact. Similarly, prosecutor performance measures need to be expanded to include other types of activities such as involvement with community groups, sensitivity to community problems and the ability to solve neighbourhood problems and to develop or direct the development of programmes for community action.

The other reason why the effect and value of community prosecution have not been proven is due to the absence of assessments addressing this question. Current information consists mainly of descriptions of community prosecution efforts (APRI, 1994) and accounts of their successes that are generally based on reports from the jurisdictions themselves (Gramckow, 1997). To date only a few internal or single jurisdiction programme evaluations exist that examine various aspects of the prosecutor's involvement in community policing and community oriented programmes in jurisdictions (Boland, 1996; Jacoby and Ratledge, 1994). In addition, researchers at Harvard University currently summarise the findings from their evaluation of four jurisdictions that implemented community prosecution (Kansas City, MO; Indianapolis, IN; Austin, TX; and Boston, MA). This assessment is, however, mainly based on qualitative data collection (Kelling and Coles, 1997). There exists, however, no systematic assessment of a community oriented approach by a prosecutor's office. This lack of information is a hindrance to identifying the value of community prosecution and developing measures to help the offices to assess their progress.

### **The future in the US and Europe**

The currently increasing support for community oriented and alternative responses to crime and community problems provide an indication that community prosecution efforts, existing in different shapes and with various scopes are likely to gain more and more support and application throughout the United States. The US Department of Justice currently supports the development of a so-called community justice initiative that focuses on developing co-ordinated community oriented responses that involve the entire criminal justice system (Reno, 1997). At this time, community policing has gained so much credibility in the US 'despite accounts to the contrary from those who thought New York City had a good community policing effort' that it is not likely to disappear thereby providing prosecutors with incentives to develop procedures and policies that coincide with this different policing approach. Accordingly it is highly probable that community prosecution is

going to be a part of the future trend in prosecution in the US.

For US prosecutors the ability and justification to engage in preventive community oriented work rests in the fact that, unlike their counterparts in western European countries, the vast majority of American prosecutors are independent, elected local officials vested with extraordinarily broad powers and moral responsibilities (Jacoby, 1980). Considering the significant differences between European and American criminal justice and local government structures, the high numbers of crimes reported and processed by the criminal justice system in the US, and enforcement policies that are sometimes antithetical to European practices, one might be inclined to look at these American experiences with community prosecution with interest but assume little relevance to European practices today or in the future.

There are, however, two developments occurring in many European countries that indicate that the experiences in the US can be of more than professional interest and may require further consideration. One is the growing application of community policing approaches by European police (Feltes and Gramckow, 1994; Jaeger, 1993; Aylward, 1993; Tansey, 1993; Eliaerts et al., 1993; Bennett, 1993; Bennett and Lupton, 1990; Friedman, 1992). Since the trend towards community policing generally impacts the work of the prosecutor in the US, triggering changes in prosecutorial work, organization, and polices, it seems likely that such an impact may be observed where community oriented policing has gained support in Europe.

Another factor is the increasing dissatisfaction of European citizens with their governments resulting in increased calls for more visibility and responsibility (Zippelius, 1993). It should be considered that government agencies in democratic societies are generally designed and obliged to be responsive to the needs of the community they serve, and that the work of a prosecutor puts him often in the spotlight of media attention making him some sort of a political figure the community responds to, no matter if he is an elected official or not (Bruns, 1994). Also, in several European countries discussions are under way about the role of the prosecutor in a changing society (Schäfer, 1994). Some promote more visibility and local level flexibility in the prosecutorial decision making process (Lamprecht, 1993; Hill, 1993), others fear that any such changes would destroy the delicate balance ingrained in the criminal justice system (Hund, 1994).

The growing disenchantment with the ability of traditional criminal justice

regions require that prosecutors, along with other government agencies, have the flexibility to constantly adapt to local situations. As long as the responses to local needs occur within constitutional parameters and are balanced to assure equality in the decision making process few arguments can be made against increased visibility and community orientation in prosecutorial activities.

The purpose of this paper was to provide an overview of the various responses prosecutors in the US have made to become more community oriented, the impact of these efforts on the office and the problems experienced or perceived so far. The discussions highlighted a number of issues, however, and as we look to the future, it is obvious that this non-traditional approach to prosecution and community activism holds the promise of exciting and innovative results that, for some prosecutors, may offer another alternative to attack some of our more pervasive criminal justice problems.

The popularity of community policing is still growing and so is the interest in new ways to improve prosecutorial and court services to better serve the community. It is especially important in light of this growing interest that the impact and responses engendered by prosecutors and courts be better understood. Because community oriented work has the potential to positively change staff attitudes towards their work, to improve perceptions and attitudes in parts of the community, positively impact on fear of crime and reduce certain crime rates there is a lot of incentive for all criminal justice agencies to develop such strategies for their jurisdiction (Mastrofski et al., 1994; Uchida et al., 1990).

Because community oriented work has the potential to improve government services in general, because it has the potential to streamlining services depending on existing needs and thereby possibly reducing costs this strategy is bound to find more advocates in many government agencies. Because these strategies place the priority on public service with and for the people they are a natural approach in democratic societies.

If community oriented work is cautiously approached, well planned, based on a comprehensive on-going needs assessment, and involves a multi-agency, public, private and business partnership that is linked to an on-going evaluation and monitoring process few arguments will speak against this sound concept of public services for the future.

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