A Short History of Vera's Work on Policing

Aaron Bloom and Dan Currie
Vera Institute of Justice

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Police departments around the world work under constant public scrutiny. When crime rises, the police are expected to bring it down swiftly. They are also expected to quickly punish officers who abuse their authority and develop systems to prevent future misconduct. Under pressure to respond with speed, however, police leaders often develop solutions without feedback from community members, researchers, rank-and-file officers, and leaders of other criminal justice agencies. As a result, new practices are often less than effective and have unintended consequences that undermine public trust in the police.

For nearly forty years, Vera has helped police departments, nonprofit organizations, and governments around the world develop and test innovations that reduce crime and promote efficient policing while minimizing intrusions on people's liberty. This work emphasizes accountability as the most important tool for improving police services. Accountability helps to reduce crime, builds stronger relationships between law enforcement and the communities officers serve, and encourages collaboration between the many groups interested in public safety. While Vera's policing projects span a broad range of issues and locations, they can be grouped into four categories: management practices, police-community relations, misconduct, and policing in democratic societies worldwide.

Police management practices

The Vera Institute launched its first project on policing, the Manhattan Summons Project, in 1964. Vera used a screening process to release suspects who could be relied upon to show up for arraignment when issued a summons, instead of keeping them in custody. As a result, patrol officers were able to spend less time escorting accused persons through central booking and arraignment and more time on the street. The experiment began in one New York precinct, but the pilot project so quickly and substantially cut into the waste of police patrol resources that, after five months, the police department began expanding it to other precincts. By 1967, the new procedures were in place citywide and were being adapted across the country. In 1971, the guidelines for release of suspects that Vera developed with the New York City Police Department (NYPD) for the Summons Project were codified into New York law.

Inspired by the success of the Summons Project, Vera has kept the goal of eliminating wasted police hours and putting cops back on the street throughout its work on policing. For six months in 1967, Vera monitored an experimental 24-hour arraignment court aimed at streamlining procedures between arrest and arraignment by relieving the backlog of cases that accumulate during the night. The Institute also developed a citywide alert system by which police, waiting to testify in court, stayed on patrol but could be called to the courthouse on short notice. And in 1969, Vera and the NYPD launched the Pre-Arraignment Project, which sped up and modernized the arraignment process for defendants once they reached the courthouse and permitted officers to be released promptly if testimony was not required.

At the same time that Vera was helping the police work more efficiently, the Institute was also developing better management practices and guidelines aimed at reducing harm to officers

and civilians. In 1966, Vera developed a system for the quick transfer of Spanish-speaking defendants from the New York City precincts to the Corrections Department (which had more bilingual personnel), in response to the wave of suicide attempts by Latinos held in precinct lock-ups. The next year, responding to the increase of incidents in which white officers shot and killed black youth, Vera helped the New York Police Department draft stricter rules on deadly force. The resulting publication, *Police Guidelines on the Firearms Law,* was distributed to every officer. Then, in response to the nationwide urban riots of 1967 and 1968, Vera was asked to design procedures for the *Administration of Justice Under Emergency Conditions*. Published in 1969, the procedures were designed to minimize violence against and by police officers and have been used as a model by other cities.

Getting better results without increasing the size of the police force is always a pressing need for large cities. To help meet this challenge, Vera developed and ran the Felony Case Preparation Project, in which precinct detectives conducted a thorough follow-up investigation immediately after a felony arrest. The project substantially increased the percentage of felony arrests resulting in a conviction, thus increasing the overall efficiency of the police force.

The Felony Case Preparation Project grew out of Vera research that examined why some felony arrests, but not others, led to conviction and identified ways for police to prepare better cases. The results of this research were published in 1977 as *Felony Arrests: Their Prosecution and Disposition in New York City's Courts*. The *Felony Arrests* research also revealed that in more than half of felony cases involving a victim, the defendant had a prior relationship, often close, with the victim. This conclusion changed the way many officials and scholars understood the criminal justice system.

While Vera researchers studied the disposition of felony arrests, the Institute conducted another important study on policing, examining the performance of female officers on their beats. The study, *Women on Patrol,* compared the tactics of and responses to 41 male and 41 female police officers. The study found more similarities than differences between male and female officers and suggested ways to improve performance for officers of both genders.

Vera's assistance with issues of police management has also taken the form of technological innovation. In the mid-1990s, the New York City Police Department asked Vera to develop an electronic crime mapping system that would be a more powerful analytic tool than the old pin maps. That crime mapping system became the basis for the department's widely known CompStat process, a crucial tool for holding precinct commanders accountable for changes in the local crime rate and for solving crime.

A few years later, in 1998, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services asked Vera to help launch a statewide system that could to map crime across jurisdictions. The first of its kind in the nation, the program enables local law enforcement agencies to electronically transfer information on crime to a central database in Albany, New York. Authorized users access the system using a secure intranet connection and can produce maps of crime incidents and arrests within their jurisdiction and across the region. Using the system people from patrol officers to police commanders—can map crime by type, date, time, and other parameters. They

can print out these maps and view the information as bar and line charts. They also can perform analyses that help identify concentrations of crime. Vera continues to work with DCJS to fine-tune the application and improve procedures for collecting and inputting data so that crimes are mapped accurately and completely. Vera is also training new users, assessing potential enhancements to the system, and facilitating its expansion throughout the state.

Police-community relations

In addition to making management more efficient, Vera's work on policing has consistently focused on police-community relations, using improved relations as an anticrime force in itself. In the early 1980s Vera began to work with the NYPD on developing the idea of community policing. Vera surveyed the results of a decade of research into police patrol across the country and found that the technique of random preventive patrol (roaming in patrol cars until called) by officers between 911 responses was very inefficient. This type of patrol had little value as a deterrent, and prevented cops from interacting with people and getting to know communities.

In response, Vera worked with the NYPD to develop the Community Patrol Officer Program (CPOP). The program was begun in Brooklyn's 72nd Precinct in 1984. Its principal architect was Mike Farrell, a New York City police officer with a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the NYPD. Farrell's experience enabled the program's designers to secure access to offices and people in the police department whose cooperation was needed. CPOP required 10 officers to get to know neighborhood residents and merchants and to work with them to identify and eliminate conditions that bred crime and the fear of crime. The program was successful: The community patrol officers made more arrests and received fewer civilian complaints than other officers and still found time to attend community meetings and organize block associations. CPOP was quickly expanded and by the end of 1986, 43 out of the 72 precincts in New York City were deploying trained community patrol officers.

The appearance and popularity of crack cocaine in the mid-1980s had a profound impact on police operations in cities across the United States. In 1989, Vera's research department began a two-year study of the Tactical Narcotics Teams (TNT), the New York Police Department's principal response to crack dealing. The study, which led to a radical restructuring of the TNT program, concluded that the special TNT units had failed to make a lasting impact on drug activity and had not sufficiently involved the communities in which they operated. Vera recommended that the TNT tactics be made available to commanders of community police operations rather than remaining the province of special units.

Continuing the focus on community policing, Vera and the NYPD established a model precinct in 1990 to test and refine the structures and procedures necessary to implement community policing citywide. As a result, the Institute developed technological innovations to improve the way officers handle information. One such innovation was an electronic beatbook to help officers track and solve chronic neighborhood problems while on their beat.

Surveying citizens for their views on the police is another important way to increase public confidence in police while gathering information that police leaders can use to improve the conduct of officers and their services. Vera has studied the use of citizen surveys and is helping police leaders around the world make better use of this tool. In the spring of 2001, the Institute began working with the NYPD to develop and test an utterly unique type of survey, one that measures how satisfied neighborhood residents are following specific encounters with police. The department and Vera are developing three indicators of neighborhood satisfaction, each relating to a different kind of encounter between police and residents. One indicator is based on surveys of residents who request help from the police. A second reflects how police treat citizens whom they stop but do not arrest. And a third is rooted in the experiences of community leaders who meet frequently with precinct commanders. Because the indicators correspond to specific police activities, they could become part of the CompStat process. The department and Vera are testing the surveys in five precincts and will gradually expand the project to survey residents from all 76 precincts.

Vera has recently been working to improve the cooperation of police with other government agencies and members of the community that have a stake in making schools and the communities surrounding them safer. Since March 2000, Vera has organized monthly meeting of police officers, community members, and school safety agents from two Brooklyn high schools and their feeder middle schools. Each coalition discussed ways to make their schools and neighborhoods safer for children. Recently, the New York City Board of Education and Police Department have decided to replicate this planning process in communities throughout the city. Vera will help facilitate the formation of these coalitions and provide initial guidance and support. Vera also monitored the recent transfer of school safety agents from the Board of Education to the Police Department.

In a separate project, the New York City Board of Education and Police Department are working with Vera to develop a special training program for school safety agents, the law enforcement staff who patrol hallways and playing grounds, ready to respond to a violent encounter. The training will help safety agents enhance their role by teaching them how to reinforce positive student behavior.

Addressing misconduct

While developing a police force that was more in touch with the community, Vera started investigating the mechanism by which civilians register complaints against police. In 1985, the Institute began a large-scale study of the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board. The researchers analyzed the disposition of an entire year's worth of complaints and interviewed numerous complainants and police officers about the process. The resulting multi-volume report, published in 1988, is one of the only major studies ever done of a large civilian complaint review board.

In the late 1990s, dropping crime rates in cities across the country were accompanied by increasing rates of civilian complaints against the police and high-profile incidents of police abuse. This lead many people to conjecture that low crime rates had an unfortunate consequence in more charges of police misconduct. In March 1999, Vera released its study, *Respectful and Effective Policing*, which challenged this idea. The report described two Bronx police precincts where both crime rates and civilian complaints against police decreased. What set these precincts apart from those with more complaints were the strong leadership styles of their commanders.

To address persistent patterns of misconduct within a police department, courts have begun to assign independent monitors to facilitate and document reforms. Vera recently launched the Police Assessment Resource Center (PARC) to assist these monitors and share lessons of the reform process. Based in Los Angeles, PARC provides on-site advice and assistance to monitors and public officials around the country. It is also a source of information on the most effective and humane police practices nationwide.

In a separate project, researchers at Vera are assessing the implementation and impact of a federal consent decree mandating reforms and external monitoring of the Pittsburgh Police Department.

Policing in democratic societies worldwide

People in countries with very different legal traditions and crime problems nonetheless face surprisingly similar problems when they attempt to reform law enforcement practices. Since 1997, Vera has been working to help newly democratic societies advance citizen safety and police accountability. In July 1997, the Ford Foundation asked Vera to survey systems of policing and police oversight in countries where the foundation is active: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, India, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and the United States. Planners and researchers at Vera assembled an international working group of police experts from five continents and created a framework to analyze and compare various systems of police accountability. Later, with support from Ford, Vera assembled an international committee of police experts to consult with police officials in three India states.

Today, Vera's International Programs Department is organizing a series of meetings that unite police leaders and reformers from around the world who are eager to embrace new methods of and practical experiments in democratic policing. Each meeting focuses on a single tool being developed simultaneously in Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Asia. The first meeting took place this June in St. Petersburg, Russia. Police officials, scholars, and reformers from nine countries debated how to use surveys of local residents to create more effective police forces. Subsequent meetings will focus on crime mapping technologies and strategies of police oversight. The meetings not only bridges cultural differences, they promote collaboration between government and the nonprofit sector. Such collaboration is particularly important in countries with a recent authoritarian past, when nongovernmental organizations were reluctant to engage with police.

Since 1996, Vera has been working intensively with the South African Ministry of Justice to improve criminal justice practices in this newly democratic country. The Ministry and Vera jointly created the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Two of the Bureau's recent projects involve the South African Police Services and feature close collaboration between the police and other agencies. The Prosecution Task Force on Car Hijacking used a team approach to investigate and prosecute these cases and made substantial headway against this crime for the first time—increasing the conviction rate from ten to fifty percent. The task force is now a permanent part of government. The Bureau's current project, the Thuthuzela Care Centre, helps the justice system treat rape survivors with dignity and respect and handle these criminal cases more effectively. Based on the model of the Prosecution Task Force, the Centre is improving police investigations, the collection of evidence, and prosecution tactics, all while providing better support to victims.

Techniques for Innovation

To advance innovative policing that is both just and efficient, Vera employs the same five techniques its staff use in all its work: focus on specific aspects of the job, create new options, convey new information, build incentives for good performance, and analyze the outcomes.

Vera's Manhattan Summons Project was as specific in its focus as a project could be: testing whether individuals with proven community ties could be trusted to show up for their arraignments. It started small, operating in only one New York City police precinct by interviewing people accused of simple assault and petit-larceny. The project offered police a new option: issuing a summons, or a "Vera ticket" as it was then known, as an alternative to detaining individuals in misdemeanor cases. As a result, officers spent less time booking these defendants, and more time on the street. An added incentive was the cost-savings of $6.7 million to the city. The evaluation of the project proved that the summons was a viable alternative to detention for many accused of misdemeanor offenses. The summons program was soon adopted citywide and has inspired similar programs in departments around the United States and the world.

The Community Patrol Officer Program offered city police a different kind of option: a crime-fighting approach that brought police officers out of their patrol cars and into the community. It therefore allowed the officers not only to react when crimes occur, but to help neighborhoods eliminate the conditions that cause crime. Daily contact with members of their community also provided the officers with information that made crime fighting more effective. An evaluation of the project showed that CPOP officers received fewer complaints to the Civilian Complaint Review Board, although they had more contact with citizens.

Respectful and Effective Policing: Two Examples in the South Bronx challenged a common assumption that undermined the need for a change in police policy: that a rise in civilian complaints of police misconduct were an unfortunate side effect of successful crime fighting. The report illustrated that the strong leadership present in the 42 and 44 precincts made it clear to officers that excessive force was unacceptable, while promoting effective police work, thus widening the possibilities for reform at other precincts and departments.

From the earliest work on the Summons Project through the development of new indicators of neighborhood satisfaction with police encounters, the Institute has worked with police and others in government, and with community members and researchers to develop policing practices that are efficient, effective, and respectful.

Chronology of Vera's Work on Policing

1964	Manhattan Summons Project
1966	System to Protect Spanish-Speaking Defendants in Custody
1967	Experimental 24-Hour Arraignment Court
	Citywide System to Alert Police Waiting to Testify in Court
	Police Guidelines on the Use of Deadly Force
1969	Procedures for the Administration of Justice Under Emergency Conditions
	Pre-Arraignment Project
1972	Felony Case Disposition Study
1975	Study of Women on Patrol
1981	Felony Case Preparation Project
1984	Community Police Officer Program
	Study of the NYC Civilian Complaint Review Board
1989	Study of NYC Tactical Narcotics Teams
	Model Community Policing Precinct
1994	Computerized Crime Mapping for New York City
1997	International Survey of Police Systems and Police Oversight for the Ford Foundation
1998	Computerized Crime Mapping for New York State
	Prosecution Task Force on Car Hijacking in South Africa [spun off into government]
1999	Study of Police Management Practices in Two Bronx Precincts
2000	International Visiting Committee In India
	Thuthuzela Care Centre for Rape Victims in South Africa
	Enhancing the Role of School Safety Agents
2001	Police Assessment Resource Center [continuing]
	International Meeting on Citizen Surveys in St. Petersburg
	Indicators of Respectful Policing in NYC

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