



Catalyst for Collaboration

Roles of a Safety Coordinator

MetLife Foundation





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LISC COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVE

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Since 1994, LISC's Community Safety Initiative has promoted strategic alliances between community developers, law enforcement and other key stakeholders in troubled neighborhoods. The partners' work creates strong, stable and healthy communities by reducing persistent crime and disorder and spurring economic investment.

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METLIFE FOUNDATION

MetLife Foundation, established by MetLife in 1976, is a long-time supporter of LISC's community revitalization programs. In 1994, the Foundation made a \$1 million leadership grant to pilot the Community Safety Initiative. MetLife and the Foundation have also made below-market rate loans and grants of almost \$71 million to the organization. MetLife Foundation supports health, education, civic and cultural programs throughout the United States. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.

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THE GOAL: INTEGRATION OF POLICING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Today, the Edison neighborhood in Kalamazoo, Michigan is a vibrant community with new businesses, outdoor murals, a police substation and additional development planned. However, someone visiting the neighborhood six years ago may have been more likely to encounter drug trafficking, prostitution and blight. How did this transformation occur? MetLife Foundation award winner, Edison Neighborhood Association, partnered with the police and other key stakeholders to focus on reducing crime and revitalizing the area. By sharing knowledge and combining resources, the partners targeted and transformed the once-distressed area into a thriving community. In neighborhoods across the country, similar partnerships have yielded comparable results.

Many MetLife Foundation award winners have noted that designating a person to move forward an integrated agenda is key to successful community-police partnerships. This person, whom we refer to in this paper as a “Safety Coordinator,” serves as a catalyst to strategic collaboration to reduce crime and enhance quality of life.

Though the role takes various forms, Safety Coordinators share a common purpose—to build formal, long-term partnerships between community developers, police departments and other key stakeholders. This kind of collaboration can take shape without a coordinator, but the experience of LISC’s Community Safety Initiative illustrates that such cases are the exception—not the rule. Why is having a coordinator so important?

► Advancing the community safety agenda is priority #1 for coordinators. In troubled neighborhoods, police have a long list of demands on their time. Likewise, community development corporations (CDCs) are busy trying to redevelop blighted properties into community assets, stimulate economic activity and support other revitalization projects. All partners have a myriad of work to do and limited time and resources with which to do it. Having a person solely focused

on the goals and desired outcomes of a safety project can be very powerful in advancing a partnership and achieving tangible revitalization results. Tammy Barnard, Executive Director of the Edison Neighborhood Association, said, “As a neighborhood association, we deal with many diverse projects and programs. Having someone on staff who was focused on crime and safety issues every day made a huge impact.”

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► Coordinators serve as a consistent point-of-contact as partners build relationships and communication networks over time. Cross-agency collaboration can be challenging with organizations as different as police departments and CDCs. Having a coordinator who is responsible for representing diverse interests and bridging gaps can be very helpful. Sarah Valenta, a Safety Coordinator in Seattle, Washington, said “You end up building trust between officers, community groups and individuals. Having consistency and one person responsible for maintaining the connections is important in getting the job done. I have standing [in these groups] and can focus attention on our target area.”

► Coordinators provide organizational support to translate good will and ideas into concrete projects that yield tangible results. Coordinators can lead efforts to craft workplans, secure necessary resources, evaluate progress and publicize successes—tasks that may not clearly fall within the purview of one organization over another, but that are critical to the productivity of a partnership.

With Safety Coordinators on board, community developers and police departments across the country have overcome barriers to collaboration and achieved significant neighborhood improvements. By the unconventional linking of innovative policing with strategic economic development, these partnerships have attracted the kinds of social and financial investments that make communities safer and more vibrant. Ideally, coordinators help build partnerships to the point where funding allocation, staffing decisions and even methods of evaluation are altered to enhance the work of the team. This paper draws on the experience of past winners of the MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Awards to explore the role of Safety Coordinators and how their positions can be structured for maximum impact.

THE CENTRAL PLAYER: SAFETY COORDINATOR 2

The Safety Coordinator's main purpose is to move forward a core agenda of coupling crime reduction and community development. While the unique characteristics and needs of each partnership will dictate the coordinator's exact position description, the following roles and responsibilities can serve as a guide.

Build and strengthen relationships between police and CDCs

A coordinator can help facilitate relationship-building between the police and CDCs, two groups that traditionally do not collaborate on a strategic level. The theory behind these unconventional partnerships is that crime reduction and neighborhood revitalization are linked—crime reduction promotes development and development promotes crime reduction. By emphasizing that the two groups share the fundamental goal of improving neighborhood stability and quality of life, a coordinator can begin to establish a mutually-beneficial relationship.



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In Lincoln, Nebraska, the Free to Grow program was focused on developing neighborhood partnerships that promote public safety and community health. As a result of efforts by community and police partners, the Clinton neighborhood witnessed dramatic improvements in crime rates and community interaction. Strong relationships were developed among the ethnically diverse residents, a variety of local institutions and the police. Phoebe Newman, a local resident, described the collaborative partnerships as having a ripple effect in the neighborhood. "People respond to people who care. It's no longer us versus them—the officers have made themselves accessible to the residents."

The Police. Like many institutions, the police are most likely to invest time and energy in partnerships that help them achieve individual and organizational goals while improving their public perception. At a time when many police departments are faced with budget cuts and limited resources, the coordinator can emphasize that the partnership seeks to increase the productivity of police by leveraging community and CDC resources to reduce crime. This leveraging promises to make law enforcement easier, a fact which can help coordinators build trust and foster dialogue about how police can in turn help advance a community development agenda in the course of their work. Dialogues of this sort—most productive when held outside of the public forum—can lead to the strategic redeployment of officers, making police important and effective allies for CDC staff and community members.

Police departments are structured organizations with rules, regulations and traditions that determine individual and organizational behavior. To effectively act as a go-between with the police, it is helpful for the coordinator to learn about and

understand their unique environment. For example, acknowledging that frequent staff turnover is normal in police departments enables an organizer to explain that such changes are not intentionally undermining long-term community engagement, and to help partners navigate transitions more effectively. To learn more about police operations, a coordinator and CDC

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partners can attend a Citizens Police Academy or be trained on crime prevention strategies with a police partner. Information gathering and outreach efforts should help CDCs understand the police perspective and earn the coordinator the respect and trust needed to hold open and honest conversations about community issues and resources.

Community Development Corporations. CDCs represent a different set of skills and resources than many community organizations with which police may be accustomed to working—specifically, CDCs have capacity to develop real estate and attract homeowners and businesses in the context of a community-led plan for neighborhood revitalization. It is helpful for police to understand these resources so that they can determine when and how they might ask their CDC partners to tackle a crime problem that is resistant to enforcement solutions. The coordinator can invite officers to CDC meetings, events and trainings that will illustrate the objectives, processes and impacts of CDCs. A thorough introduction will not only give the police a better understanding of their key partner, but will also allow them to see the community through a different lens and offer solutions with broader impact.

The Partnership. The Safety Coordinator can facilitate collaboration between these two groups. Ultimately, the once-distinct lines between institutions—the CDC and the police department—may become blurred as the partners operate as a coordinated unit to replace problematic areas and rising crime trends with community assets and rising pride. Specific examples of opportunities for a coordinator to encourage collaboration include:

- ▶ Working with police to identify crime problem spots, such as local drug houses or abandoned properties, and to explore redevelopment solutions. In Buffalo, New York, the MetLife Foundation award winning partnership between West Side Community Collaborative (WSCC) and the Buffalo Police Department identified a two block area that had severe crime and violence on Buffalo’s West Side. Working with police, residents, and other stakeholders, WSCC invested in housing development and coordinated neighborhood beautification activities. This resulted in significant improvements, including rising property values and safer streets for children and families.



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Consider formalizing the partnership in a written document like a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Swope

Community Builders and the Kansas City Police Department wrote a “Community Safety Initiative Partnership Agreement.” Swope Community Builders defined its role as crafting opportunities for economic development within the urban core and supporting Kansas City Police Department community policing activities. The Kansas City Police Department described its role as lending public safety expertise to the development process and assisting Swope Community Builders in addressing crime, fear and safety issues in other tangible ways, such as community organizing.

- ▶ Encouraging CDCs to invite and involve police in real estate development meetings, site plan reviews, and architectural design decision-making. In Southern California, MetLife Foundation award winner, El Cajon CDC involved the El Cajon Police Department's Community Policing Division in development decisions. The CDC formed a Design Review Commission to review proposed redevelopment and new construction projects. The fire marshal and a member of the Community Policing Division served on the commission to provide input on safety and crime prevention as it relates to design.

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- ▶ Recommending that CDCs include police on their Board of Directors. Also in California, the Chief of the Chula Vista Police Department was a founding board member of MetLife Foundation award winner South Bay Community Services (SBCS), a multi-service community agency. Over the ensuing 35 years, at least one member of the police department's command staff has served on the SBCS board of directors, thus ensuring that the police have an active role in SBCS' decision-making and activities.

Involve Residents and the Business Community

The coordinator can also serve as the primary liaison between residents, businesses and the police. A coordinator who is trusted by community members can create a forum (if one does not already exist) for them to discuss their concerns about safety and the history of police engagement in their community. In some areas, there may be a historical distrust of police that needs to be addressed. Also, too often, the police hear

complaints and demands from constituents in a disorganized or conflicting manner, without acknowledgement of police resource limitations. The Safety Coordinator can help reframe this typical conversation into a more productive dialogue about shared interests and strategies. Building on this foundation, the Safety Coordinator can serve as convener and facilitator for workgroups of police, resident leaders, business owners and CDC staff who together might devise a comprehensive plan to address community safety concerns. For example, the coordinator may organize CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) reviews of local businesses that provide advice on how to create a safer environment for themselves



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The partnership between the Twelfth Street Heritage Development Corporation, the Kansas City Police Department, and a number of community stakeholders resulted in dramatic public safety improvements at a local park. The process started when the coordinator convened a meeting with community members including a local block club, tenants of neighborhood apartments and local business owners to learn about and address their concerns about criminal activity in the park. These stakeholders subsequently formed a team that strategized with the police about how they could work together to address the park's problems. For their part, the residents committed to calling 911 or their community police contacts whenever they saw illegal activities occurring in the park. The owner of a nearby liquor store installed better exterior lighting and cameras and instructed employees to document illegal activity. Police added additional patrols and officers provided residents with their cell phone and pager numbers for quicker access. The park transformed, becoming a safe place for free tennis lessons provided by Parks and Recreation, Police Athletic League baseball games and many neighborhood events. In the area around the park, offenses against persons decreased by 42 percent, compared to 24 percent city-wide.

and their customers. Or, police and CDCs may work with a merchant to voluntarily ban the sale of certain products that attract unwanted clientele and inadvertently turn away legitimate customers. Again, having one person focus on making and maintaining these vital connections between groups helps ensure that all stakeholders are working together to improve public safety.

Engage Additional Partners

Once concerns are identified, the coordinator (with input from CDCs and police) can identify which other agencies should be involved in order to implement effective safety projects. Common partners include the city prosecutor, district attorney, and entities charged with graffiti abatement and removal, truancy reduction and code enforcement. In many cases, these groups not only bring their unique authority, but they also offer access to different resources that may be used to promote community-level work. The coordinator can facilitate outreach to and recruitment of these other groups by creating communication materials about the partnership's goals and successes. Once partners are brought into various projects, it is important for the Safety Coordinator to ensure that each is assigned clear tasks and all parties are held accountable for their contributions.

THE STRATEGY 3

Establish and Maintain Regular Forums for Communication

Due to the busy schedules of all partners, it can be helpful for the coordinator to establish a regular meeting schedule involving consistent representatives from CDCs and the police. This is an opportunity to go beyond larger community meetings that address public concerns about safety, and instead to create smaller working groups where key players representing each partner define and drive projects forward. These meetings represent a unique environment where traditionally separated players and strategies can be simultaneously applied to the resolution of jointly identified problems. In Weed & Seed



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The safety strategy of the West Side Community Collaborative (WSCC) involved a liaison who worked with property owners and a variety of public agencies to abate blighted properties. If a property owner was not responsive to outreach, the liaison turned to housing and health inspectors to take the owner to court and then followed up with the Housing Court to ensure the issue was resolved. WSCC also worked with the County District Attorney's Office to toughen their policies on drug sale arrests—they developed a 'no plea bargain' policy for a particular area that WSCC was working to revitalize. Word of this tougher policy spread quickly and drug activity in the area declined significantly, paving the way for further redevelopment.

programs, a subset of the Steering Committee may fulfill this function effectively. It is helpful for the coordinator to ensure that meetings are well-planned and productive with agendas, clear roles for participants, defined decision-making processes and structures for evaluating progress.

It is also important for the coordinator to maintain open, independent lines of communication with the police, CDCs, and residents. The coordinator can hold formal and informal meetings with each group individually to allow for discussion of more sensitive topics and provide opportunities for more open feedback. This kind of outreach can help the coordinator stay informed about different interests and budding conflicts—information that can help them more effectively broker collaboration and diffuse problems before they arise.

Establish a Work Plan and Prioritize Issues

The Safety Coordinator can help the partners identify a shared agenda. Once there is agreement on priorities, the stakeholders can begin to discuss potential solutions, considering the full

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— Nancy Howard, Safety Coordinator, Rhode Island

range of capacities offered by the partnership. The successful implementation of early joint efforts is perhaps the most critical step in running an effective collaboration. Therefore, it helps if the coordinator is proactive in guiding selection and execution, especially to the extent that partners take a chance and invest their own scarce resources.



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University City District (UCD) initiated a monthly meeting to discuss crime and deployment issues in the area it

serves in West Philadelphia. The meeting is attended by many Philadelphia institutions including the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, Children’s Hospital, the Liquor Control Board, the Philadelphia Police Department, the District Attorney, and the Probation Department to discuss crimes in the area and address deployment issues. UCD and the Philadelphia Police Department also co-chair a bi-weekly deployment meeting with a smaller group of attendees to discuss more pressing issues and project implementation steps. UCD supplements police work by providing unarmed civilian Ambassadors who serve as liaisons between the community and the police and address non-crime related safety issues. At the bi-weekly deployment meetings, the police will request that UCD put Ambassadors in a particular area, or keep its Ambassadors out of an area if the police are conducting an investigation. Regular communication greatly contributed to the overall improvements in this area of Philadelphia, including new business investment in the commercial corridor, façade improvements by existing businesses, clean streets free of abandoned cars, and an overall decrease in crime.

When prioritizing issues, the coordinator can consider whether projects:

- ▶ Are solvable
- ▶ Are in the common interests of the partners
- ▶ Can benefit from existing programs and resources
- ▶ Are likely to encourage future collaboration by proving valuable to all participating groups
- ▶ May have unintended consequences that should be considered early on
- ▶ Can be completed in the short, medium, or long-run
- ▶ Will reinforce organizational decisions regarding resource deployment
- ▶ Will have an impact that reflects the makeup of the partnership by taking advantage of the unique skill set offered by its membership.

Early on, it is helpful to select relevant projects that are most likely to be accomplished in the near future, namely those that require overcoming minimal institutional barriers, are relatively non-controversial, and call for little or no additional resources. Positive reinforcement is critical to establishing trust and increasing the likelihood of more tangible, long-term accomplishments. Nancy Howard, a Safety Coordinator in Rhode Island, says, “After having initial meetings, make sure you can get some easily achieved results—some little wins at first to keep people engaged.”

It is also important to continue identifying opportunities to have small wins throughout the life of the partnership to encourage continued engagement. John Fenton, Director of Operations for the Clean and Safe Streets Program of University City District, says “You establish credibility by doing things in the community.” Common examples of such projects are community clean-ups, community gardens, house painting, anti-graffiti campaigns, youth-related activities and festivals involving all partners and additional community representatives.



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HomeSight has partnered with the Seattle Police Department to make dramatic improvements to several Southeast Seattle neighborhoods through a combination of both short- and long-term projects.

The Safety Coordinator uses crime mapping and regular communication with the police to identify locations that can benefit from the partners' coordinated efforts. In several of these areas, HomeSight has facilitated infrastructure improvements to improve aesthetics, such as installing new signs and curbs. These small wins have kept local leaders engaged while HomeSight and the police pursue a long-term redevelopment strategy. As an example of a longer-term approach, HomeSight developed a 75-unit, first-time buyer residential development on a site that had become a haven for crime and illegal dumping, due in part to the fact that it was located between beat patrol areas. As the CDC finalized the financing and predevelopment process, the police helped to stabilize the area—including holding their SWAT team trainings there as a way to increase police presence. Now complete, the development is home to many families who participate in a block watch and other crime prevention activities alongside police.

The partnership should also focus on projects with a more significant and permanent impact on public safety and economic vitality. Projects like replacing problem properties with attractive homes and responsible tenants, changing the business mix to attract more legitimate economic activity or starting community prosecution programs require patience and planning, but can yield extremely powerful and sustainable change.

Monitor Progress and Celebrate Achievements

The Safety Coordinator is in a strong position to keep the group focused on outcomes rather than process. In many cases, police and community members may consider the act of meeting to

be an accomplishment in itself. For many young collaboratives, it is. However, the objective of this work is to realize tangible, measurable gains in both economic/community development and crime indicators. The coordinator can track performance measures, frequently evaluate program results and use this information to inform group decision-making.

Having this data available proves tremendously helpful when seeking resources from public and private funders. This data can also be used if the partners engage in advocacy activities like requesting public investment in specific projects or programs, or lobbying for the creation of development and safety related city ordinances.

Measuring accomplishments and sharing good news is also helpful to change negative perceptions about neighborhoods, in addition to keeping partners' motivated and residents engaged. The coordinator can lead public relations efforts, helping the organizations celebrate and take credit for each other's accomplishments and for the accomplishments of the partnership. Local press, municipal connections and community networks are all powerful forums through which to celebrate and thereby reinforce positive activities.



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Delray Beach Weed and Seed recognized the importance of monitoring progress and sharing successes. The Delray Beach Weed and Seed Coordinator was responsible for monitoring program results against goals and objectives.

She then created reports summarizing these results that community and police leaders used to inform decision-making and communicate progress to the broader community. To keep stakeholders informed and build broad-based support, she also regularly shared the results of smaller-scale projects and anecdotal stories that put a human face on the Weed and Seed group's accomplishments.

STRUCTURING A POSITION

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The Safety Coordinator position can be structured in many ways. The most effective coordinator positions of past MetLife Foundation award winners are those that function with a “dotted line” reporting relationship to both the police and community developers, regardless of where the coordinator sits and how the position is funded. Table 1 describes three of the more common ways that a coordinator position may be structured.

Table 1. Potential Structures for a Safety Coordinator Position

	Typical Model	Pros	Cons
Within a CDC	The Safety Coordinator is a staff member of the CDC and typically operates out of the CDC office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coordinator has easy-access to the community developers that make ‘brick and mortar’ changes in a neighborhood. ▶ Residents may feel more comfortable discussing concerns with a CDC staff person than someone who is viewed as having an official function with police. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coordinator may have less access to the police than in the other models.
Within the Police Department	The coordinator is physically located at the police department and has access to police communication systems. S/he may or may not be an official civilian employee of the police department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coordinator has greater access to the police, possibly including command staff as well as patrol officers. ▶ Coordinator may have more access to crime data and operations information than a member of the general public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ If community members have historically distrusted the local police, locating the coordinator within the police department may curtail active community involvement.
At an intermediary	The Safety Coordinator is housed at an intermediary (such as a local LISC office, university, or other city-wide or regional institution) and acts as a convener of CDCs, police and other stakeholders who live and work in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coordinator can benefit from the intermediary’s broader resource pool and influence with elected officials and funders. ▶ Coordinator maintains neutrality and is not necessarily considered to be on a ‘side.’ ▶ Coordinator may have a greater scope of impact by working with multiple CDCs in a region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Success is reliant on finding leaders at the community level who have the time and interest to carry out projects. ▶ Coordinator needs to pay careful attention to protocol and boundaries with local groups.



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In Minneapolis, Minnesota, the partnership between the American Indian Neighborhood Development Cor-

poration (AINDC) and the Minneapolis Police Department is supported by a coordinator who is a civilian employee of the police department and works out of a safety center operated by the CDC. The safety center is a hybrid of a community center and a police station—AINDC set up a computer area where police officers can come in and access the precinct downtown. As a police employee, the coordinator can perform functions that a member of the general public could not. For example, the coordinator can file certain levels of reports and do crime prevention training for citizens and business owners on how to protect themselves and how to report crimes. Yet because the coordinator is located in an AINDC facility, community members feel more at ease coming to the coordinator to discuss safety issues. AINDC operates in an area with a large immigrant population, and these immigrants are more comfortable going to the safety center, as opposed to a precinct, to share their concerns.

“Knowledge and experience working with different groups is key. It’s all about relationships. Coordinators need to be able to work with police departments and with the community which each have their own unique culture.”

— Nancy Howard, Safety Coordinator, Rhode Island

the coordinator can attend trainings on facilitative leadership models or crime prevention techniques, and conferences to share and discuss relevant issues. The coordinator can also consider encouraging community members and police to join in these professional development opportunities. Nancy Howard, a Safety Coordinator in Rhode Island, said, “I find it helpful to attend conferences and bring the police and community with me...When you get these two groups away and together, great things happen.”

FINDING THE RIGHT PERSON 5

The Safety Coordinator position requires a unique mix of skills and experience. Strong facilitation abilities, interpersonal skills and project management experience are particularly key. Since the Safety Coordinator will be working closely with both CDCs and the police, it can be helpful to give both groups input into the hiring decision, such as by involving representatives of the main partners in interview committees.

Even though the coordinator will come to the position with skills and experiences that help him or her succeed, continuing professional development is always important. For example,

SAFETY COORDINATOR RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM LISC CSI

- ▶ Sample job description and suggested interview questions for a safety coordinators
- ▶ List of relevant resources to support public safety partnerships
- ▶ Case studies for previous MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Award winners
- ▶ Mailing list about CSI webcasts, trainings and publication releases

To request any of the above information, please send an email to csi@lisc.org

FOR MORE EXAMPLES

on how Safety Coordinators have made a difference in projects around the country, please refer to the MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership case study series on LISC’s online resource library: www.lisc.org/resources.



501 Seventh Avenue, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10018
212-455-9800 • www.lisc.org

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