

CORE PRINCIPLES FOR POLICING ROLE



Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) is a community-based diversion approach with the goals of improving public safety and public order, and reducing unnecessary justice system involvement of people who participate in the program. The following are the core principles that lay the foundation for success for the policing role.

Officer and front line supervisor “ownership”. This is a new role and one that relies on their discretion and expertise. Officer indifference or resistance will seriously limit LEAD’s effectiveness. Periodic review with officers to identify and fix operational issues goes a long way to establishing a sense of line officer ownership over the program.

Key role of sergeants/front line supervisors in operational design. It is critical to involve front line officers and sergeants who will respectively make or supervise discretionary decisions about diversion. They have to make this work despite any initial skepticism and confusion, and need it to actually work operationally in order to give it their sincere backing.

Using highly-regarded, proactive units. Because this is a new role, launching LEAD with officers in prestigious, hard-charging assignments that traditionally make drug arrests helps ensure the program is regarded as “real” police work.

Engaging patrol and patrol supervisors. Despite the value of beginning with specialized proactive units, for the program to have an effect at the neighborhood level, patrol officers and their supervisors eventually must be integrated and must make use of the program. Otherwise the bulk of appropriate suspects and cases will go through “system as usual” processing.

Peer to peer training by sergeants and officers. This is vastly more effective in explaining LEAD than simply directives from commanders or pleas by outsiders to use the program. LEAD is a new and additional tool, and when explained as such by officers who actually use and like it, skepticism is lowered.

Detailed training on social service barriers facing people who are homeless and/or struggling with addiction and/or with mental health concerns. Such training helps debunk myths that if people wanted help they already would have gotten help or that getting housed and getting treatment is just a matter of willpower. In particular, officers often do not understand how criminal history can result in exclusions from housing and other benefits. Additionally, officers often receive minimal (if any) training on substance use disorders or mental health and are frequently unfamiliar with harm reduction. Including introductions to these topics in officer trainings is critical.

Detailed operational protocol. The operational protocol should: guide the way discretion will be used by officers and sergeants; specify who makes decisions and how those decisions are documented and reviewed, and; ensure that LEAD referrals are streamlined and fit into officers’ normal business practices.

No more onerous than “business as usual.” LEAD must be “just another tool” for officers. To that end, LEAD referrals should be no more time consuming or difficult than it is to book someone into jail and refer them for prosecution.

Documenting the decision to divert or not divert eligible arrestees. Since the program relies on officer/sergeant discretion, documenting how that discretion is used is important for review and re-training.

Clearly articulating situations where LEAD is not a good fit. LEAD is designed to engage people whose

criminal behavior is motivated by illness, drug use, and behavioral health issues, as well as poverty and subsistence needs. Referral of individuals whose behavior is motivated by other factors (profit, involvement in an organized drug distribution operation) will disappoint officers and community leaders because the program's resources are not capable of substituting for those motivations.

The importance of allowing social contact diversions.

Although originally designed as pre-booking diversion for individuals detained or arrested in the course of regular police work, the value of allowing for referral via a social contact route entry has been well-demonstrated. As officers become more familiar with LEAD and see its success at fostering positive behavior change and better outcomes for both participants and communities, they become more invested in making referrals as a crime prevention and crime reduction

strategy. Forcing them to rely on arrest as the sole means of referral can be counterproductive and can delay engagement, eventually, officers who become accustomed to using LEAD may come to regard arrest as a strategy of last resort for low-level drug offenses and offenses related behavioral health conditions and/or poverty. Allowing them to make social contact referrals allows for more immediate response to real problems, without coercion, and promotes the transformative nature of LEAD.

Including lines officers and sergeants in the Operational Workgroup.

The operational workgroup is where LEAD operational partners regularly meet to manage the project. It is critical to have line officers and sergeants participate and to share expertise and insights with case managers and prosecutors in a way that builds cooperation and mutual respect.

Updated 4.12.17