

Nexus Policing at a Glance

What does ‘Nexus Policing’ mean?

The word ‘nexus’ refers to a *linking* or binding together. In the context of policing, it refers to a linking together of different ways of defining, understanding, and resolving community safety issues.

The different forms of understanding are found in a range of diverse ‘safety partners’ – individuals, groups and/or organisations, for example community members, community groups, NGOs, public sector agencies, businesses, etc.

In this light, Nexus Policing also refers to a *linking together of community safety practices* that reflect *diverse points of view and knowledge bases*.

Why conduct Nexus Policing?

The police are highly skilled professionals that possess special knowledge, capabilities and resources. Nexus Policing helps police to expand their capacity by acknowledging and harnessing the potential of community safety partnerships. This is achieved by:

1. Seeing issues from all possible vantage points by linking with all other safety partners who can offer different understandings of community safety issues, thereby
2. Implementing comprehensive, innovative, efficient and sustainable approaches to community safety that draw on diverse capabilities and resources.

By providing an evidence-based approach to problem solving that is developed from speaking to and learning from all safety partners, Nexus Policing gives police the capacity to develop more targeted solutions to community safety issues than they can through more traditional approaches to problem solving.

How is Nexus Policing done?

Nexus Policing consists of a *phased thinking process* aimed at determining the kinds of links required between police and their ‘safety partners’, why the links are needed, and how to build and sustain the links.

The phases in Nexus Policing are:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identifying a safety issue2. Identifying current and potential ‘safety partners’3. Identifying how safety partner links can be created and/or strengthened4. Designing and implementing a Nexus Policing pilot model |
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These phases are meant to be a *fluid process of refinement* (of safety issues, safety partners, pilot goals and operational scope) *and implementation* rather than a rigid sequence of events. Police and their safety partners return to previous phases in the process if they discover, for example through feedback from safety partners, that they require more information or insight at any particular phase.

Throughout the phased thinking process it is important that the key discoveries arising from the process are recorded methodically, so that previous learnings may be reapplied or re-evaluated during subsequent phases or even subsequent Nexus Policing projects. Please refer to the Project Diary Worksheet.

PHASE 1: IDENTIFYING A SAFETY ISSUE

The safety issue that forms the broad focus of a Nexus Policing project may be identified in the first instance by PSA Managers or senior management level in Victoria Police and implemented at different operational levels (e.g. PSA level, operational unit or department level, or organisation-wide). The safety issue focus is then refined or even re-identified through consultations with other police members with a more hands-on knowledge of daily operational issues.

[See Example 1 – Some research approaches for conducting consultations]

[See Example 2 – Focus of Nexus Policing projects as at Dec 2007]

The safety issues that are important in the community arena are seldom completely known from the outset and should not be approached purely from a police perspective. It is important to remain open to having the Nexus Policing project re-focused or even re-scoped several times through subsequent consultations with safety partners to better reflect the realities facing the project team, or as new circumstances emerge.

[See Example 3 – Refining the focus of a Nexus Policing project]

PHASE 2: IDENTIFYING CURRENT AND POTENTIAL SAFETY PARTNERS

Once a safety issue has been agreed upon, police identify and approach other stakeholders (individuals, groups and organisations) that they think are relevant to the safety issue. Safety partners identified in the early stages of a Nexus Policing project typically include prominent government agencies (such as DHS, DOJ, DSE) and community organisations. The knowledge of these safety partners is gathered in order to further define the safety issue and to identify additional potential stakeholders.

As relevant safety partners are identified, police begin a series of consultations aimed at defining (or ‘mapping’) and understanding the nature of the safety issue (‘*what?*’), the mix of stakeholders relevant to the safety issue (‘*who?*’), and the various ideas on how best to achieve particular safety outcomes (‘*how?*’).

Mapping the nature of a safety issue means taking stock of how a particular safety issue is defined and understood by individual safety partners. It is important to keep in mind that there may be differences in perspectives *within* different safety partner organisations as well as between them.

[See Example 4 – Mapping safety issues]

Mapping the landscape of stakeholders entails making a comprehensive list of safety partners, including contributors that are not immediately obvious. It is crucial to place special attention on *traditionally marginalised individuals, groups and organisations* in the maps, such as young people or ethnic or Aboriginal communities, so that they can play an active role in shaping the Nexus Policing project. These societal groupings typically have a great deal of insight into the management of safety issues but historically have had a weak voice on the management of these issues.

[See Example 5 – Mapping safety partners]

As part of the mapping process, police develop an understanding of how existing safety partners currently relate to one another. For example, do they already have links with each other and/or with police? If so, what kinds of links are they? How well do they work?

Police continue the mapping process until they are sure their knowledge of opportunities for establishing new, or enhancing existing, community safety links is comprehensive. The information collated so far regarding safety issues, partners, and links is assembled in a mapping report. In the report, this information is supplemented by any other relevant information available from sources external to the Nexus Policing project, such as reports from government departments, policy statements, findings of related research, etc.

PHASE 3: IDENTIFYING HOW SAFETY PARTNER LINKS CAN BE CREATED AND/OR STRENGTHENED

The safety partners are invited to confirm the key findings documented in the mapping report. Police may engage with safety partners via forums, individual conversations, group meetings or workshops (etc). At this stage it is important for police and their safety partners to think carefully about the kinds of links that currently exist or that may be required between police and their safety partners; how such relationships could be improved; which individuals, groups or organisations are currently not ‘linked in’ at all; how precisely such links can be created in a sustainable manner; and the desired outcome(s) of such links.

[See Example 6 – Workshop to identify Nexus Policing links in need of improvement]

Conversations with existing and potential safety partners about the safety issue and about existing community safety linkages (partnerships) need to be sufficiently open-ended for those participating to offer alternative priorities and perspectives with regard to which relationships should be improved and how.

Police (either alone or together with their safety partners) may find that, at this stage, their knowledge of specific safety issues and/or specific links between safety partners is not yet robust enough for them to move forward with a recommendation for an innovative Nexus Policing model. In this case, conduct more in-depth research into safety issues and/or links between safety partners. Such research may include surveying public perceptions or conducting in-depth interviews or focus groups with safety partners, community members, and/or with those who have been in conflict with the law.

[See Example 7 – Further research conducted in the Crime Department project]

PHASE 4: DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A NEXUS POLICING PILOT MODEL

The mapping report, either alone or in conjunction with information arising from more in-depth research, provides the basis for creating a pilot discussion paper. This document consists of recommendations on the focus and key components of a Nexus Policing pilot model.

[See Example 8 – Nexus Policing Pilot Discussion Paper for the Crime Department]

A pilot design workshop is held in order for the police and the relevant safety partners to discuss the proposed Nexus Policing pilot model as detailed in the pilot discussion paper. Several pilot design workshops may be required to sufficiently refine the pilot model, depending on the complexity of the relevant safety partner links. Relevant safety partners are those seen by police as being essential in implementing the pilot model. During the workshop(s), the pilot model is designed in principle, refined if necessary, and then advanced through action items, with clear tasks and roles for each safety partner being established.

Methods for assessing the pilot model on a process level and an outcome level are also designed: *process-level measures* refer to the quality of the Nexus relationships formed between police and their safety partners, such as the level of reciprocal understanding that these linkages produce; *outcome-level measures* refer to particular targets or 'hard outcomes', such as increased perceptions of safety or reductions in recidivism. Great care is required in establishing performance measures that are realistic within short-, medium- and long-term timeframes.

[See Example 9 – Performance measures and evaluation]

The tasks outlined in the refined pilot discussion paper are implemented in the field, and the established performance measures monitored. If the monitored performance measures consistently show signs of not being achieved within the specified timeframes, either previous Nexus Policing phases are returned to in order to further refine the pilot model, or the performance measures are re-assessed.

Want to know more?

'Nexus Policing at a Glance' provides a quick reference guide to the Nexus Policing process, and is a summary of a more comprehensive report – the 'Nexus Policing Toolkit' – which is being developed by the Nexus Policing central coordination team (made up of the Victoria Police Service Delivery Team and members of the Australian National University). The Nexus Policing Toolkit provides detailed instructions on how a team can develop and implement a Nexus Policing project, and includes information about additional topics such as potential barriers and challenges to conducting Nexus Policing and how they may be dealt with, and diffusion of a Nexus Policing model to other sites.

Further information is available from the Service Delivery Team at the Victoria Police Centre:

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Appendix

Example 1 – Some research approaches for conducting consultations

1:1 Interview	Focus Group	Survey
Provides mostly qualitative data (words; <i>what</i> people think about a topic; <i>how</i> people perform a task) plus maybe some quantitative data.	Provides mostly qualitative data (words; <i>what</i> people think about a topic; <i>how</i> people perform a task).	Provides mostly quantitative data (numbers; <i>how many</i> people think or do something & to what degree), plus maybe some qualitative data.
Small number of participants (typically < 5).	Medium participant numbers (typically 2 – 10 per group).	Many participants (typically 100s).
Most flexible with respect to consultation timing and location.	Relatively flexible with respect to consultation timing and location.	Typically low response rate; may need several follow-ups.
Most in-depth; can follow up on important or interesting comments, and on inconsistencies.	Interactive – group discussions can bring forth new ideas. Can follow up on some comments.	Cannot be changed once it has been administered.
Private and confidential.	Relatively confidential.	Anonymous.
Transcription of audio file, and content analysis of transcript.	Transcription of audio file, and content analysis of transcript.	Statistical analysis of quantitative data.
Example participants: program co-ordinator, community leader, offenders.	Example participants: support agency workers, police members, youth.	Example participants: neighbourhood residents, shopping precinct patrons, railway station users.

Example 2 – Focus of Nexus Policing projects as at Dec 2007

Nexus Policing projects have centred on issues such as family violence; safety in and around public train stations, a housing estate and a shopping precinct; police relationships with an indigenous community; youth safety; and the management of sex offenders post-release.

Example 3 – Refining the focus of a Nexus Policing project

The Region 5/City of Casey project initially focuses on youth-specific safety problems such as anti-social behaviour and low-level juvenile offending (graffiti, shoplifting etc.) in a local shopping centre. As the consultations with safety partners proceeded it became clear that the young people involved in acts of delinquency also displayed challenging behaviour in other areas of their lives, including school truancy. The project team therefore began liaising with school staff and parents regarding truant children as this had a flow-on effect on the behaviours displayed in the shopping centre. While the project retained a youth focus, the situation on the ground necessitated a modified approach to what had been initially discussed.

Example 4 – Mapping safety issues

In Region 4/Rural City of Wodonga, youth safety was identified early on in the mapping stages by a number of stakeholders, including youth themselves. However, the police and the youth sector took somewhat different approaches to defining ‘youth safety’: whilst to the police this meant the absence of either crime undertaken by youth or threats to a young person’s individual safety, the youth sector took more of a wellbeing focus. This included long-term approaches to promoting youth safety by developing young people’s capacity to problem-solve and find solutions to what they viewed as threats to their safety.

Example 5 – Mapping safety partners

The safety partners mapped in Region 1/City of Richmond included the Richmond Estate Action Group (REAG), Richmond Safety Committee, Richmond Roundtable Group, North Richmond Public Tenants Associations, Richmond Timorese Association, North Richmond Community Health Centre, local business owners, City of Yarra, local MPs, private security services operating at the North Richmond Housing Estate, DHS – Office of Housing, Jesuit Social Services, the Richmond Football Club, and local media. Efforts to engage with residents of the public housing estate were continuing at the time of writing.

Example 6 – Workshop to identify Nexus Policing links in need of improvement

The Region 2 / City of Wyndham project held a workshop that identified the specific links that needed to be improved for effective agency coordination around the issue of family violence. These links revolved primarily around the design of a referral system between police and agencies assisting victims of family violence, and involved strengthening existing feedback loops. Workshop participants included representatives from local police, the Victoria Police Family Violence Advisor, the Wyndham Family Violence Committee and local family violence referral and support agencies.

Example 7 – Further research conducted in the Crime Department project

The main focus of the Nexus Policing project designed by the Crime Department was the management of sex offenders in community settings, aimed at reducing recidivism and maximising offender reintegration post-release. While this focus was decided upon following early conversations with a small number of key stakeholders, information gleaned from many of these stakeholders pointed to a subsequent need for more in-depth information which could only be obtained by consulting sex offenders directly. One-on-one interviews conducted with clients of a sex offender treatment program by a Forensic Psychologist revealed invaluable insights into the perspectives of the offenders. The resulting Nexus Policing project was a model for managing knowledge about sex offenders and optimising their care upon release from prison.

Example 8 – Nexus Policing pilot discussion paper for the Crime Department

The pilot discussion paper created to assist in designing the Crime Department model gives a definition of the problem and the scope of the model; a general overview of current trends in the field of sex offender management; the specific components of the proposed Nexus Policing model; and the challenges that would need to be resolved for the model to function well as an ongoing project. This document format allows readers to quickly understand the central issues surrounding the proposed project, and the rationale underpinning it, irrespective of the reader's background or prior experience in the field. This strategy ensures that all stakeholders discussing the pilot model design are at the same level of understanding and can contribute equally.

Example 9 – Performance measures and evaluation

Ultimately, the Nexus Policing journey is one of testing new ways of doing police business – specifically, by reflecting on and learning how to conduct evidence-based policing. Not every initiative undertaken under the Nexus Policing umbrella will have an impact on the target community. The altered behaviour of that community should not be conflated with the performance measures typically adopted by the police and other stakeholders. For example, the goal of the Nexus Policing project designed by the Crime Department was not merely to reduce levels of recidivism among sex offenders post-release. Rather, the goal was to strengthen networks between police and agencies in order to better manage sex offenders. This may or may not have an immediate flow-on effect on the behaviour of offenders, but that is a separate inquiry of research.

Evaluations should consider both process-level and outcome-level performance measures, and determine which would be best suited to the specific Nexus Policing project in question. The model designed by the Transit Department measured public perceptions of safety on and around trains and in railway stations pre-intervention. A second round of community consultations will be performed post-intervention in order to measure whether people's perceptions have changed. By contrast, the pilot model designed by Region 1/City of Richmond, in which community attitudes to police and feelings of safety in Richmond were examined, could use the number of completed surveys returned to the police as a project performance indicator: while the first round of surveys generated an exceptionally low response rate from residents of the public housing estate, interventions occurring as part of the Nexus Policing project may increase people's willingness to engage with police (for example by participating in research initiated by police). This in itself could be more indicative of community attitudes to police than the actual answers given in the survey.