

## 11 Tips for Building a Strong Relationship with Local Law Enforcement

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Condo/HOA experts say one way you can help owners feel more secure is by fostering a strong relationship with your local law enforcement. Here are 11 tips for doing that.

1. **Seek ways to work together.** "The is community policing 101: The more you can involve law enforcement on things of concern to the residents, if you loop law enforcement in, you'll all end up benefitting," states Edward Hoffman Jr., the founder of Hoffman Law LLC, a two-office law firm based in Pennsylvania, who has represented community associations for more than 18 years. "I don't think communities should view law enforcement as an obstacle but an ally, though relationships will differ depending on the type of community you're in, including whether it's small or large, urban or rural, and so on."

2. **Identify your community liaison.** "Every department has a community liaison," says David R. Anderson, an Alexandria, Va., crime prevention consultant and co-author of *Managing to Prevent Crime: A Guide for Property Managers*. "It's good to know who that person is and to build a relationship. Invite that person to your [association meetings](#) and to make a presentation.

"If your local police department is small, get to know the chief by asking for a meeting," he adds. "Usually, there's some problem going on, and that can be the reason for the meeting, or it can simply be a get-to-know-you meeting. Then, when a problem develops, you've got someone to work with. You don't want your only contact with police to be when there's a problem."

3. **Hire officers to do overtime in your community.** "What we do where I live is contract with law enforcement to have their officers work for overtime in our community," reports [Matthew Zifrony](#), who advises homeowners and condo associations at Tripp Scott, a Ft. Lauderdale law firm, and who has also served as the president of a 3,000-home association.

"My community has contacted our local sheriff's office, and if officers want to earn a couple of extra hours, we hire them to sit in their patrol cars to have a visual presence," he explains. "I'm not sure how much benefit we get out of it; I guess it's deterrence. But if we ever have a problem, they're willing to help us out.

"I think, in general, establishing good relationships with those around you is always important," says Zifrony. "People will go above and beyond because of that relationship, and policing is an important function to say the least. You don't want to have a bad relationship with the police."

Check whether your state has a law that might help you fund such services. "For HOAs in Louisiana, we have a provision allowing the HOA to create a crime district tax that provides the HOA with revenue to improve security," explains attorney J. Andrew Murrell of Baton Rouge, La., who represents community associations. "You could pay for additional uniform patrols, cameras at neighborhood entrances, and even license plate readers at neighborhood entrances. This additional revenue is a tax, but that tax is used to [increase safety](#). And the byproduct of paying for additional patrols nets an improved law enforcement relationship and presence."

Tax districts for such a purpose aren't a thing in California, but you could just [assess owners](#) for such costs. "We don't have crime tax districts," says [Joan Lewis-Heard](#), a senior associate at SwedelsonGottlieb in Los Angeles, who at any given time represents hundreds of condos and HOAs throughout California. "You could do some sort of special assessment as long as you follow all the rules to do that. But I can't imagine an association wanting to do that. It might ruffle some people's feathers. And in general, you're increasing your own liability if you're [trying to take on the police function](#)."

4. **Investigate the possibility of offering housing.** "Condo communities have a luxury if they're large enough that they can offer a unit as compensation to a police officer to live onsite," states Murrell. "This increases security, provides a strong crime deterrent, increases response time, and fosters a cooperative relationship with law enforcement."

5. **Complain wisely.** "Community members have to be careful what they complain about," says Tod Burke, a retired criminal justice professor at Radford University in Radford, Va., and a former Maryland police officer. "Let's say speeding is an issue. You talk to any police officers, and they'll tell you this story. The community association has had enough of those darn kids speeding and asks the police to do something about it. The police set up radar, and who do they catch? The homeowners. Homeowners have to abide by the same standards they're complaining about."

6. **Be reasonable.** "You shouldn't insist that the police do a particular thing without listening to their solution," says Anderson. "They may not be able to implement your solution. Instead, use a partnership approach by asking for help in a more open-ended way. You could say, 'We're concerned because traffic is going 20 mph over the speed limit. What do you suggest?'"

7. **Don't waste officers' time.** Make sure your residents minimize their nuisance calls to the police department. "Often the police department is very familiar with a community or building if, for example, you have residents who have alarm systems and frequent false alarms," says Eric J. Gould, an attorney at Cohen, Lerner & Rabinovitz in Royal Oak, Mich., who represents homeowners associations and lives in one. "If you have a lot of alarm systems in the community, it's important to ask neighbors to have them checked so they don't go off unnecessarily. Remind everyone that things like that affect the community."

8. **Adopt a cop.** "You don't have to issue a formal invitation," says Burke. "But you should invite the police into your home just to chat, or if an officer is in your development, stop and say hello. In our area, we also have what's called adopt a cop. Community members invite officers over for dinner or to community gatherings so residents can see the officer as a person, not just as a police officer."

9. **Keep residents informed.** "It's a good idea for a homeowners association to have a section in its [newsletter](#) with crime prevention tips and reports of problems," says Anderson. "For example, if there have been break-ins, keep residents informed about what's going on and how the police are responding. That makes people feel better about what the police are doing to address problems."

10. **Support police events.** "If your police or fire department is sponsoring an event, your association can score big points by lending a hand," says Gould. "You could staff a booth, provide some type of sponsorship, or make sure some of your residents are there. The police or fire department could probably use the help, and you'll be establishing goodwill. Police officers tend to know who appreciates their services and will reciprocate in kind."

11. **Listen to your owners' concerns.** Many law enforcement officers today say they feel less respected and trusted, and some of your owners may feel that way about your local police department. Does that mean you shouldn't try to work with your local law enforcement? There's no easy answer, and the answer in your community should be guided by listening to your owners' opinions and ensuring you've considered them carefully before acting.

"I think that, as with any decision, there can be good and not good that comes out of it," says Zifrony. "On the good side, having a greater presence of law enforcement in your community, you'd hope, would deter crime. But it does also open up the possibility of an officer going beyond their responsibility and creating a problem.

"But I'd rather have a good relationship with the police if, god forbid, something like that happens," he notes. "Then our relationship with the police may be beneficial in resolving the issue. But I certainly see both sides. Is there a chance that by having this relationship, you've increased the likelihood of that type of incident? I guess that's a possibility."