



Holding police  
community outreach and  
accountability meetings:  
**A handbook**

# Holding police community outreach and accountability meetings: A handbook

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All illustrations by Simona Bunardzhieva

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# 1. Introduction

This handbook focuses on police accountability to the public and responds to the need to issue practical advice to neighbourhood police inspectors on the application of the internal Procedures on the Organisation of Neighbourhood Police Inspectors' Work.

Since police community outreach and accountability meetings are a comparatively new tool being used to build trustful relations between communities and law enforcement agencies, most of the neighbourhood police inspectors face serious challenges while organising these meetings. Therefore, participants in Saferworld's training sessions requested a handbook to give guidance on organising the meetings.

This handbook is designed for neighbourhood police inspectors and can be applied practically. It aims to help police inspectors find answers to the following questions:

- What is the best way to organise meetings with the public?

- What do you need for the meetings to become an effective mechanism for maintaining communications between the police and the community, helping to win the latter's trust and support and consequently increase people's security and safety?



## 2. Legal framework for police community outreach meetings

### The Kyrgyz Republic

Outreach meetings are one of the mechanisms for maintaining communication between the police and the public, aimed at establishing trust and support between the police and local communities. At the level of legislation, local police departments' reporting to the public is governed by Article 18 of the Kyrgyz Republic Law *On Crime Prevention*. According to this law, periodic reporting by law enforcement agencies to the public on the work they have carried out to combat crime and delinquency is one of the methods of general crime prevention.

With the adoption in 2010 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Order No. 169 'On measures to improve local police officers' work', neighbourhood police community outreach meetings have become an established practice. Guidelines on the organisation of neighbourhood police officers' work appended to the Order contain the rules for holding outreach meetings, according to which the local police officers

must conduct quarterly outreach meetings with the public in their assigned operational areas.

In February 2013, as part of the priority measures to reform the law enforcement system, a special Order No. 28 was issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs obliging all heads of law enforcement agencies to hold local police community outreach meetings on the results of their work for the previous year. These outreach meetings are becoming a normal practice in police work, improving interaction with the community and thus preventing crime and ensuring citizens' security and safety. It should be noted that according to sociological surveys, this approach matches society's basic needs.

## The Republic of Tajikistan

Aimed at establishing trustful and reliable relations between the police and local communities, outreach meetings are one way of maintaining communication between the police and the community. Regarding legislation, Presidential Decree No. 1291 of 30 June 2012, 'On measures enhancing the role of local police inspectors in ensuring public safety and recommendations for their engagement with the public', has the status of a norm which governs law enforcement agencies' accountability to the public. According to the Decree, the periodic reporting of the law enforcement agencies to the community

is necessary to prevent and combat crime and delinquency, being one of the most efficient methods of general crime prevention.

Local police community outreach meetings have become an established practice since the Ministry of Internal Affairs Order Number 10 of 23 February 2013 'On measures to improve local police officers' work' was adopted. Guidelines on the organisation of neighbourhood police officers' work appended to the Order contain the rules for holding local police outreach meetings, according to which local police officers must conduct quarterly outreach meetings with the public in their assigned operational areas.

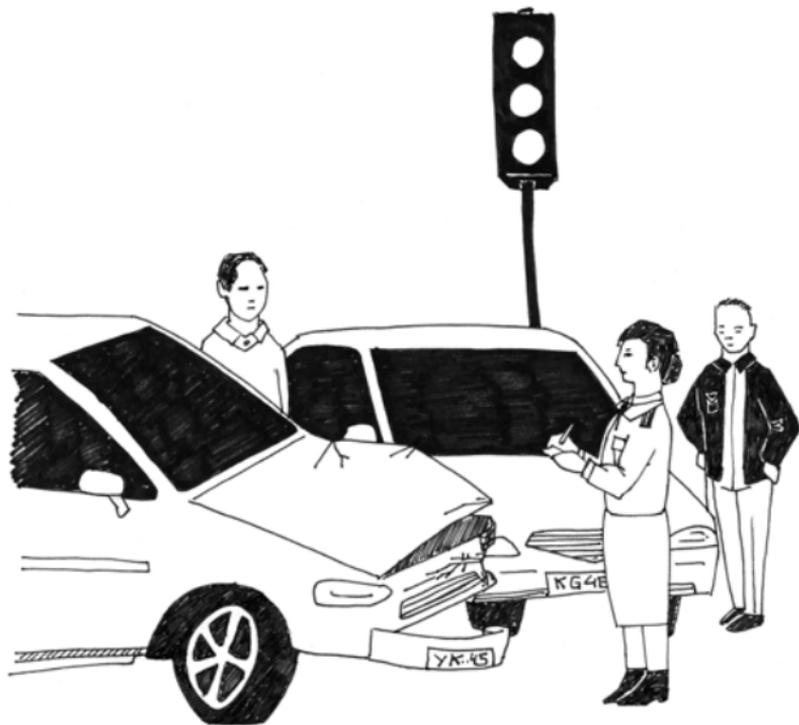
The Tajikistani Government Resolution No. 296 of 3 May 2014 approved the *Reform Program for the Police (Development) for 2014–2020*, according to which:

*“Police engagement with the public is a priority for the Republic of Tajikistan police force reform (development). The engagement is carried out for the purposes of meeting the challenges of improving police accessibility for the public, protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens, prevention, detection and solving of crimes and other offenses, and law enforcement.*

*Police engagement with the public allows them to combine forces for the organisation of activities to improve the quality of public services provided by the*

*police to local communities, increase public trust in the police, and achieve positive changes in social relations and positive results in the work of the police.*

*One way to improve public confidence in the police is to inform the public about the crime situation in the neighbourhood and the police performance. When analysing crime figures in the cities and regions the police hold regular meetings and notify the public via the media about the state of crime in a particular area in order to inform the public about the crime situation in their places of residence.”*



### 3.

## How to prepare for and hold a meeting between the police and the public

Neighbourhood police inspectors' outreach meetings are aimed at strengthening engagement with the public in order to ensure citizens' participation in community security and thus prevent crime. In order to achieve the meetings' goals, it is necessary:

- **To meet the public's expectations** – that is, the meeting must meet the expectations of the residents present at the meeting. The outreach meeting should discuss the issues that affect the majority of the population, to avoid dwelling on the problems of individual residents or a particular community. These issues are defined at the regular working meetings of local neighbourhood police inspectors.
- **To yield tangible results** – it is very important that people feel the benefit of neighbourhood police presence: active participation in the meetings and the extent to which they have led to the changes in the security situation in their community need to be measurable.

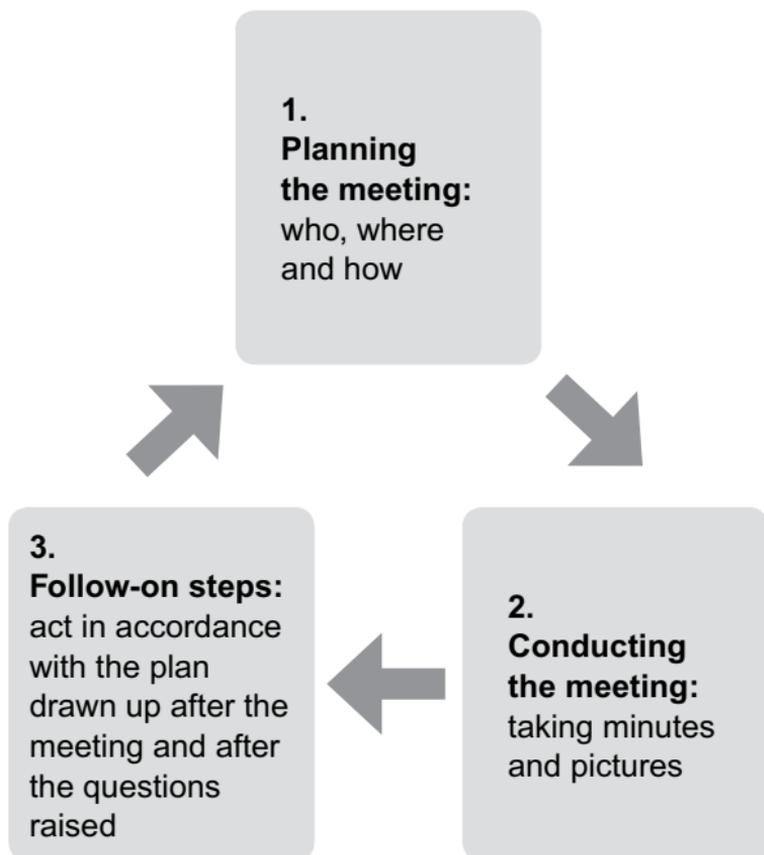
- **To be part of the community's life** – the meeting format must conform to the local mindset, ethics, culture and customs of a particular community. Note all existing traditional ways of solving problems in the community (such as the role of informal leaders/ opinion makers, elders (aksakals), where and how gatherings or meetings are usually held) and use these mechanisms in order to build trustful relations between the community and the representatives of the law enforcement agency, and find out as much information as possible about their activities (for example the work of the village mayor, aksakal courts and youth committees).

### **Who can participate in the outreach meetings between police officers and the public?**

- Representatives of all segments of society must be included: no one should be excluded (residents of all electoral wards from a particular village/districts/ jamoat – community).
- Strive for diversity: it is important to include and support women, youth and ethnic minorities (residents from ethnic groups other than the indigenous one).
- People who live and work in the village and take an active part in the life of the community: teachers, doctors, social workers, all formal and informal leaders (such as imams, toragas – chairmen of the elders' courts, pastoral committees, local

non-governmental organisations, village elders, and others).

The diagram below shows the main stages of an outreach meeting:



## 3.1. Meeting plan

### Meeting objectives

- The meeting should be based on and carried out in accordance with the agreed local police plan for the area.<sup>1</sup>
- At the beginning of the meeting a local police inspector should give a brief summary/overview of the offences and the general security situation in the region (the area that he or she covers).
- It is also important to provide detailed information on the **police actions** and the results of tackling the issues identified in the local police crime prevention plan and the problems raised by the residents at the previous outreach meeting, as listed in its minutes.
- **Other agencies or partners** participating in the meeting and contributing to community security provision should also provide information on their activities (for example, the local authority bodies, Community Security Working Groups, community crime prevention centre representatives, and social and education workers).
- Community representatives (i.e. residents) should have the opportunity to openly ask questions during the meeting, in writing or orally.

<sup>1</sup> A police plan is a document that defines the most (about five) important issues for a particular area and forms in turn part of the district police plan.

- It is essential to take minutes of the meeting and write down all the questions, answers, and planned actions that were identified, to refer to at subsequent meetings.

### 3.2. How to ensure participation of the greatest number of people

- Meetings should be scheduled for the proposed dates, for example, the first Monday (or any other day of the week) of each month that will not interfere with everyday life in the community. When planning it is important to make sure that various public holidays do not coincide with the dates of the meetings.
- **Notices of the forthcoming meetings should be published** in local newspapers, on bulletin boards (e.g. on information boards in health centres, stores, and police departments). Where possible, invitations for participants should be prepared and distributed via people such as the school management, activists, and the local government.

The meeting venue should be convenient, accessible, and located somewhere so that the majority of the community can attend. This can be a school assembly hall, a House of Culture (the local building for cultural events), or another facility located in the community.

### 3.3. Conducting the meeting

- **An organising committee/working group** should be set up and a chairperson/leader should be elected to conduct the meeting. Depending on the area, this can be any formal or informal leader from the community where the meeting is being held. Note: A neighbourhood police inspector does not have to conduct the meeting himself. He or she reports to the public, answers questions, and provides information about the work carried out at the request of local residents.
- A clear agenda for the meeting with rapporteurs' names, details of the meeting (time and place) should be drawn up, to be discussed with the core group (including village elders, chairmen of public crime prevention centres, and local authority bodies) that may supplement the information (report) by the local police inspector.
- All formal and informal leaders (including the Local Crime Prevention Centres and the Community Security Working Groups) should be notified in advance about the meeting and the venue, and, if necessary, drafted in to help organise and conduct the meeting (in particular, to mobilise communities to participate in the meeting).

## 4. Practical tips

- If local traditions/mindsets prevent or limit the participation of women or young people in the meetings, one should, where possible, arrange individual meetings with these groups.
- Any questions/issues that cannot be resolved at the meeting should be recorded in order for specific steps to be taken to deal with them or identify potential solutions before the next community outreach meeting.
- Each community should create support groups (core activists) consisting of a number of people who can help organise and conduct community outreach meetings and ensure the residents' attendance at meetings (gatherings). They can also assist in the implementation of the meetings' decisions and dealing with the problems of crime prevention.
- If you cover an area comprising several villages, community outreach meetings are better being held separately in each village, firstly because they would be closer to the residents of a particular community; secondly because local residents would be more open as the issues discussed would be specific to their village; and finally because a greater number of residents would be able to take part in the meetings.

- When developing a meeting agenda and naming people responsible for particular items on the agenda, it is important to make these meetings relevant not only to the police but also to the locals. It is important to get feedback from village heads, neighbourhood committees, and members of the Local Crime Prevention Centres on the related issues.
- The outreach meetings must not be conducted too often, in order not to lose the public's interest and to be able to have enough time to solve the problems voiced by the residents at the last meeting. One must also take into account the limited opportunities of the residents to come to meetings during seasonal work in the fields or during Friday prayer (Juma namaz). It is necessary to consider various options to hold meetings in convenient locations for local residents (for example schools, mosques and field camps).

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working with governments, civil society and international organisations to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives.

Association of Scientific and Technical Intelligentsia (ASTI) is a non-governmental organisation working to strengthen the role of the non-profit sector and promote the development of democratic reforms and the improvement of quality of life in Tajikistan.

Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) is an independent non-governmental organisation based in Kyrgyzstan, working to prevent conflict and build peace in Central Asia.

Development Initiatives Workshop (MIR) is an independent non-governmental organisation that works with young people in Tajikistan to challenge the stereotypes of poverty and build their capacity to actively participate in resolving problems affecting them and their society.

Saferworld (Kyrgyz Republic)

28/87 Sultain-Ibraimov Street, Osh, 723510, Kyrgyz Republic

Tel/Fax: + 996 (3222) 5 01 74

Email: [general@saferworld.org.uk](mailto:general@saferworld.org.uk) · Web: [www.saferworld.org.uk](http://www.saferworld.org.uk)

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