Citizen survey seeks input on priorities

The Walnut Creek Police Department in California twice mailed its Police Service Survey to community representatives, to provide the department a baseline about community priorities. Each time, the survey asked residents the same five questions:

1. Please tell us about a traffic problem in your neighborhood or in the area of your business.
2. Please tell us about a crime problem in your neighborhood or in the area of your business.
3. Do you have any suggestions about how the police can best address these problems?
4. Have you informed the police about any of these problems? (If the answer was yes, they were asked to explain how.)
5. Which of these areas should be a priority to patrol officers? (Rank in order of importance: 1=Most Important, 5=Least Important)
   - Traffic Enforcement
   - Patrol of Public Facilities (Parks, Trails, Shopping Areas, Schools).
   - Community Relations (Meetings, Foot Patrol, Community Education).
   - Preventive Patrol (Field Presence of Officers)
   - Other (Please Specify)

Comparing the survey done in October 1986 with the follow-up in April 1987 after the new community involvement efforts had been in effect showed marked changes in citizen priorities. In the earlier survey, traffic enforcement was clearly the top priority that the citizens wanted the police to handle. Almost half the respondents listed traffic enforcement as the number one police responsibility, with preventive patrol second, at roughly 35%. In the April follow-up, preventive patrol was listed as the top priority, with almost half the respondents assigning it the number one slot. In the follow-up, traffic enforcement was cited by slightly more than 30% as the top priority, making it the second-highest priority.

In both surveys, public facility patrol ranked third, both times with roughly 15% of the citizens surveyed marking it as the top priority. Only about 2% of the respondents listed community relations as their top concern in the October 1986 survey, and this rose somewhat, to about 5% by April 1987.
As noted in the article, Chief Karel A. Swanson also sent a letter to the targeted citizens' representatives once specific community concerns were identified through the survey and through beat officers' reports. The letter specified the particular problems that had been identified in the individual's locale and provided a list of officers, their work hours, and their telephone numbers, urging people to call them with any information or concerns. In addition, the letter provided people the telephone number for the Crime Prevention Unit, so that they could call to have a speaker come to talk to community groups.