

On his website, [Stephen Goldsmith](#) reviews current academic research that is most relevant to practitioners, policy advisors and policy makers.

This document summarizes: Becton, J. Bret, Leslie Meows, Rachel Tears, Michael Charles and Ralph Ioimo. "Can Citizen Police Academies Influence Citizens' Beliefs and Perceptions?" *Public Management* May 2005: 20-23.

*City and local officials involved in law enforcement and public safety often struggle to build trust between their police force and citizens. Establishing a citizen police academy has been an effective strategy in a number of communities.*

In this article, Bret Becton *et al.* examine the benefits of engaging citizens in law enforcement through citizen police academies. The authors offer recommendations on increasing the value of citizen police academies to citizens; for example, more awareness of citizen police academies, even without more participation, can improve perceptions of police.

Citizen police academies offer three primary benefits. First, citizens learn about the operations, policies, and challenges of the police department, allowing a better understanding of the actual role police officers play in their communities. Second, the academies provide citizens and police with positive interactions with one another. Finally, the academies help build a relationship of trust and cooperation between police and citizens. This relationship develops, in part, because police officers are able to dispel myths about police and police activity.

Despite these potential benefits, little research has been conducted on how citizen police academies actually influence citizens. In 2004, the Center for Government at Auburn University conducted a survey of 659 residents of the commonwealth of Virginia on the impact of citizen police academies, including any changes in citizens' beliefs. Of those surveyed, 71 percent did not know whether their police departments had a citizen police academy, while only 14 percent indicated that their department did have one. Approximately 45 percent of all police departments do have citizen police academies, so these low results may indicate a 'disconnect' between citizens and their police departments.

The survey also revealed that only 2 percent of those surveyed had actually taken part in an academy. Yet, 85 percent of survey participants believed that citizen police academies promoted positive relations between police and citizens. The survey found that the greatest benefit of the academies was the positive change in citizens' perceptions of the police. Citizens who had participated in or knew about the academies tended to have both a more favorable perception of the police and a better understanding of what police do in their communities.

Based on the results of the survey, the authors explore the benefits and suggest areas for improvement. The study reveals, for example, the need for greater citizen awareness of the academies; this awareness of citizen police academies, regardless of participation levels, benefits both citizens and police.