





POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	FIELD INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS	
	POLICY NUMBER: 1-9	ISSUING AUTHORITY 
	EFFECTIVE DATE: June 12, 2025	Christine A. Elow Police Commissioner

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

This policy provides guidelines under which officers may conduct field interviews and field observations and identifies the limitations officers must observe to prevent a lawful interaction with a citizen from inappropriately escalating to one requiring either reasonable suspicion or probable cause.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to:

- A. comply with all applicable constitutional requirements when conducting field interviews and observations;
- B. conduct interviews of victims and witnesses in a calm, courteous, and respectful manner such that persons being interviewed may cooperate with police and provide important information without omissions.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *FIO*: Field interview and observation.
- B. *Probable Cause*: There are trustworthy facts and inferences that would lead a reasonable person to believe it is more likely than not that a specific crime was or is being committed; and/or evidence of a crime is in a particular place.
- C. *Reasonable Suspicion*: There are trustworthy facts and inferences that would lead a reasonable person to believe that there is a concrete possibility that a crime was, is, or will be committed; and sometimes the suspect is armed and dangerous.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Non-Custodial Interview

1. A non-custodial interview is an interaction with a police officer where a citizen is not in police custody. The person is free to leave at any point during the interview. There is no requirement that an officer provide Miranda warnings during a non-custodial interview because the person is not being detained, is not being significantly restrained, and is free to leave.

B. Field Interviews

1. A *field interview* is an interaction in which a police officer identifies an individual and learns the person's purpose for being in a particular area. It is a limited consensual encounter that does not reach the level of a formal stop and/or frisk, both of which trigger constitutional protections.
2. A field interview may consist of the following activities:
 - a. approaching an individual to initiate a conversation;
 - b. asking an individual to identify themselves and their business in the area;
 - c. noting the person's physical description, racial identity, ethnicity if appropriate, vehicle, location, and associates; and
 - d. asking permission to take an individual's photograph, with the understanding that if permission is denied, the officer will not take their photograph.
3. Relevant legal principles to consider during field interviews include the following.
 - a. Officers may not use words or conduct which would lead a reasonable person to believe that they are not free to leave.
 - b. An individual does not have a legal duty to cooperate with police inquiries.
 - c. An individual is not legally obligated to answer the questions posed to them.
 - d. Any attempt to detain the individual, even momentarily, without objective grounds for doing so, is not permissible.
 - e. An individual's refusal to answer or cooperate, without additional information, does not constitute grounds to detain them.
 - f. A person may openly photograph or video record officers during a field interview.

C. Field Observations

1. A *field observation* does not involve contact with a person or group but involves an officer conducting an investigative observation as a means of gathering sufficient information or intelligence to develop sufficient facts to support further action. It may be a means of gathering information or intelligence regarding personal or group conduct, associations, vehicle information, and other appropriate information.
2. Characteristics of field observations include the following.

- a. Officers may observe persons known to them who may have previously engaged in some form of criminal activity or who may still be under some form of pre- or post-trial supervision.
 - b. Officers may observe individuals who appear to be engaging in activities or are in places that arouse officers' suspicions.
 - c. Officers may observe subjects already under investigation to collect additional information that may further enhance the investigation and share that information with other investigators.
- D. Characteristics that Distinguish a Field Interview from an Investigatory Stop
1. Limited encounter with questions limited to ID and business in the area without suggesting a requirement to comply.
 2. Only accepting ID that is voluntarily offered.
 3. Promptly returning ID after review.
 4. Limited number of officers present, no blue lights or siren, and no interference with a person or group's freedom of movement.
 5. The encounter extends no longer than is reasonably necessary to identify the person or group and establish their business in the area.
 6. *Miranda Warnings* are not necessary.
- E. Reporting Procedures for Field Interviews/Observations and Investigatory Stops
1. Officers should use the department issued FIO form. FIO forms are discoverable in court proceedings and hard copies are retained for a period of 5 years. As such, officers should ensure their FIO forms are as detailed as possible. Specifically, officers should adhere to the following procedures.
 - a. All appropriate boxes should be checked off to indicate the reason for the FIO (observed, interviewed, or stopped), as well as the role of the individual in the interaction, such as a victim, witness, or suspect.
 - b. If a person or vehicle is frisked or searched, the appropriate box should be checked off and indication made whether the investigating officer had probable cause or consent.
 - c. Any tattoos, scars, or visible marks and their locations on the body documented.
 - d. Provide a clothing description when appropriate.
 - e. If there is a CAD number, citation number, or file number associated with the FIO form (there will likely be one of these numbers unless the officer is only reporting an observation), check the box at the top right of the form and fill in the number.

- f. If officers make observations/identifications based on prior reports, such as *looking to ID emails*, the file number from the original incident should be documented on the FIO form.
 - (1) If officers obtained an individual's license/ID card, the number and type of identification should be documented in the appropriate field.
 - g. Write the narrative on the back of the form and articulate the facts in a format similar to an incident report. If more space is needed, use a second form and indicate such on the bottom right of the form (page ___ of ___).
 - h. Officers should submit their completed FIO forms to their immediate supervisor, usually a patrol sergeant, for approval. FIOs should be reviewed and approved by a supervisor before the end of the shift. Once signed and approved by the supervisor, the form should be placed in the folder located in the Shift Commander's office.
 - i. Officers should not email the Crime Analysis Unit in lieu of filling out a form. If there are photos associated with the FIO form, officers should email the photos to the Crime Analysis Unit.
- 2. All FIOs should include an explanation of the purpose for the encounter. Legitimate intelligence purposes include the following.
 - a. A person known to be associated with a gang or criminal enterprise.
 - b. A person who is the subject of an on-going investigation.
 - c. A person who is known to be under some form of pre- or post-trial supervision.
 - d. A person in a suspicious location based on known associations.
 - e. A person acting suspiciously based on the time of day for the observed activity.
 - f. A person who appears to be engaging in or about to engage in criminal activity.
 - 3. A member of the Crime Analysis Unit will collect all FIOs for submission to the Crime Analyst who will enter them into the Records Management System.
- F. Homeland Security
- 1. Suspicious activity related to Homeland Security shall be documented in an Incident Report.
 - 2. Some examples of such suspicious activity may include, but are not limited to, the following.
 - a. Persons observed, or reported to have been, taking photographs, making sketches, or taking unusual interest in the details of certain infrastructure such as tunnels, bridges, fuel storage facilities, or similar venues that may be considered high value targets for terrorism activity.

- b. Persons who are in possession of, or attempt to gain possession of, uniforms, equipment, or identification that may not be consistent with legitimate needs.
- c. Persons in possession of false or altered identification documents.
- d. Persons involved in acquiring unusual materials, or inordinate amounts of materials that could be used in the making of dangerous devices.