

Executive Summary



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Seattle
Community
Police Commission

Our city. Our safety. Our police. Better together.

Contact us:

**Office of the Community Police Commission
PO Box 94765
Seattle, WA 98124-7065
206-233-2664
OCPC@seattle.gov**

www.seattle.gov/policeCommission

This Executive Summary and the full 2014 Community Outreach Report are available online at **www.seattle.gov/policeCommission/resources.htm/**.

Executive Summary

The Seattle Community Police Commission and Community Engagement

In 2012 the City of Seattle entered into a Settlement Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to reform the Seattle Police Department (SPD) after the DOJ reported a pattern or practice of constitutional violations by SPD. The Settlement Agreement called for the creation of the Seattle Community Police Commission (CPC), whose members represent a broad range of community perspectives and who are charged with providing community input on the police department reform process and reform proposals. The CPC is responsible for engaging Seattle's diverse communities to understand and represent their viewpoints, and to give them a voice and stake in improving police services.



Lisa Daugaard, *Co-Chair*, Diane Narasaki, *Co-Chair*, Claudia D'Allegrì, Bill Hobson, Jay Hollingsworth, Kate Joncas, Joseph Kessler, Tina Podlodowski, Marcel Purnell, Jennifer Shaw, Kevin Stuckey, Rev. Harriett Walden, Rev. Aaron Williams

The CPC's first community outreach activity was conducted during October 2013. A major focus of this community outreach effort was to obtain feedback on the CPC's draft policy recommendations related to bias-free policing, stops and detentions, use of force, and in-car video recordings. This feedback was included in the CPC report on its policy recommendations issued November 15, 2013. During the 2013 outreach, the CPC also sought community perspectives about the reform process in general, the role of the CPC, experience with the police, and guidance for future community engagement activities.

The level of community participation was remarkable. Those who took part expressed an overwhelming appreciation for being asked to participate and a high interest in having future opportunities for ongoing discussions. Nevertheless, the time constraints of the process presented many challenges and prevented some important partner organizations and constituencies from participating fully. The timeframe also contributed to some skepticism that community feedback would meaningfully influence final policies and reforms adopted by SPD.

The 2013 Community Outreach Process

The CPC sought the perspectives of the general public, police officers and their union representatives, and other key stakeholders in the reform process, but commissioners were particularly interested in learning the views of those in Seattle who have had historically troubled relationships with SPD, or who have been traditionally underrepresented in the policy making process.

The CPC made a special effort to invite members of these underrepresented communities to offer their perspectives on police department reform in safe forums by contracting with 13 community-based organizations that directly serve hard-to-reach populations, and by reaching out to many more. In all, more than 100 organizations participated in the outreach effort.

The CPC and its partners and supporters brought together more than 3,400 community members at over 150 meetings. Both quantitative and qualitative feedback was received—participants completed over 3,000 survey questionnaires and facilitators extensively documented key themes identified during the meeting dialogues. While most surveys were completed in English, 464 surveys translated into languages other than English were completed.

Survey Results

The CPC survey was designed to facilitate broader participation; it was not designed or administered in a way that would result in a statistical representation of community views of all who live or work in Seattle. In order to ensure comparability, many questions in the CPC survey were similar to those in a community survey commissioned last year by the federal Monitor overseeing the Settlement Agreement on police reform in Seattle. The CPC survey asked additional questions and captured more demographic information about respondents. The Monitor’s survey, conducted

in English by telephone, provides useful information and an overview of the opinions of Seattle’s population as a whole. However, the CPC thought it important to provide other avenues to ensure equitable access to people who traditionally have not had a voice, and who may have substantial concerns with police practices in order to get a more complete picture of community attitudes. For this reason, the CPC surveys were administered in multiple languages, conducted in facilitated meetings in marginalized communities and hosted by trusted community leaders. Special care was taken to receive input from people with mental illness and other disabilities. The Monitor has agreed that the CPC survey results will be valuable in providing a complete baseline of community attitudes about SPD.

Demographics

The CPC was successful in its goal of reaching many underrepresented people. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the surveys were completed by individuals who identified themselves as people of color. (The Commission acknowledges that the term “people of color” has different connotations and is meant here to describe people who, though vastly different, do not identify as Caucasian.) Over 24% identified as immigrant or refugee. Twelve percent (12%) were under age 18, 18% were between 18 and 25 years old and 23% were 56 years of age or older. The split between males and females was generally even (49% and 48% respectively), and 1% identified as transgender. About 16% identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

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Equality of Treatment

A large majority (68%) do not believe the SPD treats people of different races and ethnicities equally and 65% do not believe the SPD serves all areas of Seattle equally. Two-thirds or more believe Seattle police do not treat people who are homeless or those with criminal records as well as others. More than 50% feel those with mental illness or problems with alcohol or drugs, young people, and people who are Islamic or of Middle Eastern descent are not treated equally and more than 40% do not believe members of the LGBT community are treated as well as others.

Respondents generally believe police engage in a range of negative actions very often or somewhat often. The highest results concerned treating people differently because of their

race—73%, racial profiling—69%, and use excessive physical force—60%. All of the remaining negative behaviors except two scored above 50%.

Interaction with SPD and the Accountability Process

Nearly a third of the respondents have made a complaint to SPD, and of those 57% were dissatisfied with how SPD handled it. Nearly two-thirds (64%) have had or a member of their family has had a personal experience with SPD, and of those 60% rated the experience negatively. An open-ended question asked those with experience with SPD to comment and fully 71% responded. Almost half (48%) of the comments were coded as having a negative sentiment. Most comments expressed concern



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about the police being physically or verbally aggressive (14%), being rude/disrespectful (13%), and concern about police discrimination (12%).

Policies to Improve SPD's Performance

The survey also included a question about ways to improve SPD's performance. Several of these areas provided feedback specific to elements included in the CPC's draft policy recommendations. A very large percentage (75% to 88%) believes these steps may, or will, make a difference.

Overall Findings

Even though survey respondents reported numerous negative views of the police, they still gave the police relatively overall high marks for keeping people safe, doing a good job serving their neighborhoods, and treating people respectfully. In short, even though respondents believe that the police are effective in doing their jobs in the community as a whole, a large number of respondents completing the survey believe SPD treats some people unequally and that SPD officers engage in numerous negative behaviors.

Key Themes from Community Meetings

People attending community meetings identified what needs to change in SPD, offered ideas and solutions, and provided feedback on the CPC's draft policy recommendations. The major themes raised during the meetings were consistent with the survey findings. There is deep distrust of SPD due to people's belief and experience that some police officers demonstrate bias, stop people unfairly, use unnecessary force and avoid scrutiny by failing to employ in-car video recordings properly.

Bias

Those who attended the meetings believed police demonstrate bias by profiling and by lack of understanding and tolerance of other cultures and customs and by other behaviors including rudeness, disrespect, intimidation and bullying. They believe police are unresponsive to some crime victims and some neighborhoods receive less service—because of either individual bias or institutional practices that result in biased outcomes. There was strong support for hiring more officers from diverse backgrounds and for mandating effective cultural competency and other training (i.e. crisis intervention) that provides officers vital skills in dealing with many different people. There is also strong support for a robust accountability system to track complaints, collect data and measure success in reducing bias in SPD. There was strong support of the CPC policy recommendations on bias-free

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policing, and some suggested that an education component is needed so community members know their rights to file bias complaints and how the associated investigation process works.

Stops and Detentions

Many believe some people are stopped unfairly due to racial and other profiling, prejudice, ignorance of customs, criminal backgrounds or for other reasons that are not valid. They believe officers may not understand the limits of their authority to stop and detain, and many community members do not know their rights in these situations. They believe there is a great need to educate the public and train officers on their rights and obligations in this area, and perhaps provide the public tools to use when stopped. Although many participants were positive about the intent of the CPC policy recommendations—to make clear the rules for stops—a number expressed concern that the recommendations did not entirely address the problem. As provided under the CPC’s proposed bias-free policing policy, there was support for documenting and tracking stops to identify patterns of disproportionate treatment of those stopped by the police.

Use of Force

There is significant concern that police too often use force when it is unnecessary, sometimes exacerbating situations by resorting to bullying or abuse. Many cited personal experience or knowledge of the problem in their own communities. Solutions most often concerned training officers to deal with difficult individuals, de-escalating incidents and providing education to the public on the rules on using force and on how to report incidents. A number of strategies in hiring and providing ongoing support to officers were also suggested. Many commented that SPD’s proposed policy was cumbersome and that it would help both officers and the public if the policy was simplified and clearer. Participants supported the proposed SPD policy related to reporting and investigating most use of force incidents, although some believed even minimal use of force incidents should also be reported and investigated. Participants made several additional policy recommendations, including that the policy establish use of force and de-escalation standards to be used in situations involving civil disobedience.

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In-Car Video Recordings

Community members expressed considerable skepticism about police use of in-car video recordings. Many favored very limited officer discretion (more automatic triggering of cameras, with some support for having cameras on all the time). The need for community education was emphasized to ensure the public understands both the manual and automatic mechanisms for recording, as well as their rights to document police actions. Many expressed support for an effective accountability system to ensure compliance with recording policies. Most also supported the CPC recommendations and believe consistent, reliable recordings are in the best interest of both officers and the public. Some suggested that SPD look into the value of body cameras, especially for officers not using patrol cars; and while wanting recordings available, many expressed concern about the right to privacy and thought the policy should address this difficult issue.

Ideas for Future Change

Despite criticism, participants also shared many favorable observations about SPD officers and suggested various improvements. Some participants reported the positive, respectful interactions they had experienced with SPD officers. Others noted that a single “bad” officer can taint the reputation of the whole department; and some identified poor behavior of officers in other jurisdictions that unfairly tarnishes the reputation of SPD officers. A number of youth talked of officers they trust and with whom they have had good experiences—by their actions, these officers showed respect and demonstrated that they cared, offered help, and related to the challenges faced by these young people. A key theme struck over and over is the need for officers to form relationships with the diverse communities in

Seattle. There were many suggestions for how police could initiate better connections with the communities they serve. These connections could improve communications and relationships which are not effectively served by some of the formal channels that exist today.

Current Status and Next Steps for 2014

Community Engagement Report

The report on the outcomes of the CPC’s community engagement activities in 2013 will be issued to the parties of the Settlement Agreement, and to others with a high interest in and responsibility for public safety and police accountability in Seattle, including the organizations and individuals the CPC partnered with to conduct its outreach.

Review of Adopted Policies

The court has already approved a new use of force policy for SPD and final policies on bias-free policing, stops and detentions and in-car video recordings will be approved and in place in early 2014. The CPC will review the approved policies, assess the extent to which they incorporate key provisions recommended by the CPC, and report back to the community on the provisions in the final policies, how these compare with the CPC’s recommendations and on the recent policy making process.

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Review and Recommendations on SPD Training on Key Policies

In 2014, the CPC will make recommendations on training curricula and related topics associated with training in a number of areas including bias-free policing, stops and detentions, use of force and crisis intervention. The deadlines for CPC recommendations vary, with some to be delivered during the first and others during the second quarter of the year.

Data Analysis and Recommendations Regarding Patterns in Enforcement Actions

Pursuant to the new bias-free policing policy, SPD will partner with the CPC to identify areas in which disproportionate enforcement occurs with respect to certain racial, ethnic or national origin groups, and where other equally effective practices might yield less disproportionate outcomes. Researchers working with the CPC will analyze SPD data on arrests, stops, detentions, citations and use of force in support of that project.

Review and Recommendations on SPD Accountability

The CPC will also review SPD's accountability system, including the policies, structure and processes of the Office of Professional Accountability (OPA). It expects to make recommendations in this area by April 30th.

Review and Recommendations on SPD Outreach

The CPC is also responsible for reporting on SPD's community outreach initiatives and may suggest strategies the department can employ to increase public confidence. The timeline for this work during 2014 has not yet been established.

Workgroup Members

Community Engagement Workgroup

Claudia D'Allegri and
Kate Joncas, *Co-chairs*
Jay Hollingsworth
Diane Narasaki
Rev. Harriett Walden

Bias-Free Policing Workgroup

Jay Hollingsworth and
Rev. Harriett Walden,
Co-chairs
Claudia D'Allegri
Lisa Daugaard
Marcel Purnell

Stops and Detentions Workgroup

Bill Hobson and
Jennifer Shaw, *Co-chairs*
Lisa Daugaard
Kate Joncas
Joseph Kessler
Kevin Stuckey
Rev. Aaron Williams

Use of Force Workgroup

Joseph Kessler and
Rev. Aaron Williams,
Co-chairs
Jay Hollingsworth
Kate Joncas
Jennifer Shaw
Kevin Stuckey
Rev. Harriett Walden



