COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS A TOOL FOR COMBATING RACIAL PROFILING

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This paper argues that community engagement can be an effective way to combat racial profiling, both in terms of listening to the concerns of racialized Canadians and as a strategy to help police officers better understand and address those concerns. Such a strategy can strengthen community-police relations, add more coherence to police service operations, and contribute to a more dynamic approach to professional policing in a diverse society.

INTRODUCTION

Racial profiling by police has emerged as one of the most pressing concerns for members of racialized communities across Canada. Police services are struggling to respond to these concerns, seeking to balance, on the one hand, uneasiness about admitting that these concerns are genuine and the culpability implications for their members, and, on the other hand, taking seriously the rights of racialized Canadians in a context where the mandate of these services is to serve and protect all citizens.

This paper advances the idea that community engagement can be an effective way to combat racial profiling, both in terms of listening to the concerns of racialized Canadians and as a strategy to help police officers to better understand those concerns. Community engagement theory recognizes the importance of involving all stakeholders, including the marginalized and voiceless, in the development process of police practices and initiatives (Duraiappah, Pumulo & Parry, 2005). Community engagement has been principally used by police for crime control and order maintenance — the enforcement side of policing. Using community engagement to combat racial profiling requires extending it to the service delivery side of policing. Doing so can enhance community empowerment, add more coherence to police service operations, and contribute to a more dynamic understanding of professional policing in a diverse society.

OTTAWA'S TRAFFIC STOP RACE DATA COLLECTION PROJECT

A model for this type of community engagement is provided by the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) in the case of their recent Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project (TSRDCP). This project stems from a settlement with the Ontario Human Rights Commission in 2013 in a case involving a racial profiling complaint against the OPS by a young black man (http://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/news-and-community/Traffic-Stop-Race-Data-Collection-ProjectTSRDCP.asp). The authors both led the expert research team that designed and undertook the project.

Community engagement relies on police-community partnerships. Prior police studies suggest the two common and important goals of police-community partnerships are *1)* to

create mutual understanding between police and the community about racial profiling; and *2)* to provide a forum for each group to listen to the other's concerns. If the partnership is successful, then a third goal can be achieved: to develop working relationships that will arrive at joint solutions (Lamberth, *et. al.* 2005; Foster & Jacobs, 2016).

In order to achieve the three levels of police-community partnerships, the OPS has developed over the past decade the Partnership in Action (PIA) as the fundamental framework for strategic community engagement and partnerships. PIA aims to identify and build upon community involvement and engagement within policing. Beyond the mobilization of particular communities, the PIA is concerned with how to link micro-assets to the macro-environment for sustainable community-driven development.

PIA is a practical application of the concept of social capital in police work. Social capital refers to features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and trust which increase a society's productive potential (Putnam, 2000). It is built on a web of relationships that exist within any given community that allows people to succeed or advance through associating together. Social capital is present in the networks, norms, and social trust inherent in associations whose members work together in concerted collaborative action. In a literal sense, social capital is the store of good-will and obligations generated by social relations. As a police lever, it is a strategy directed towards expanding police organizational capabilities by engaging the rest of the community in policing solutions.

The TSRDCP formed a Community Police Advisory Committee (CPAC), comprised of sworn police officers and community members. The CPAC community advisors are for the most part select members from the long-standing Ottawa Police Service Community Police Action Committee known as COMPAC, which in turn is comprised of a coalition of active ethno-racial community member who have regularly consulted and worked with the OPS on other community-policing initiatives. The launching of CPAC leveraged the existing relationships between the community and the OPS, and empowered the advisory committee to serve as a mediator between members of racialized communities concerned about racial profiling and the police.

CPAC helped establish the research focus of the TSRDCP, the shape the research design strategy – down to the fundamental question of what 'race categories' would be in the data field – and the focus for the final analysis and report of findings. The advisory committee had an impact on every stage of the research project, working together with the researchers to develop and refine the methods to be used for data collection, and consult in the application and dissemination of research project information. After an initial 'feeling out' process marked by cautious communications, police and citizen members came to share experiences and ideas, challenge one another's perspectives on the police and the community side, and ultimately deepen the discussion about race relations and racial profiling issues in the City of Ottawa.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Actualizing effective community engagement requires communication and consultation. The TSRDCP approach included the following issues for consideration:

- Identify any conflict of interest.
- Make sure that facilitators and scribes used at focus groups and workshops are clear about their role and have been briefed and/or trained.
- Ensure that the venues for the consultation sessions allow maximum participation, by assessing the location for access by people with disabilities and by public transport.
- Ensure that privacy and confidentiality guidelines are adhered to in relation to comments collected during the consultation.
- Anticipate and plan for any specific support that may be needed to enable some groups to participate in the consultation.

The range of engagement methods to empower citizens included:

- Project Web Page Updates: ottawapolice.ca/race
- Project Intranet/Wiki Page Updates for OPS members
- Project Email Box Monitoring: racedata@ottawapolice.ca
- Project Phone Line Monitoring:
- Project Updates to Stakeholders & Partners
- Project Updates/Reminders to OPS Members
- Ride-Alongs with Community and Media
- Questionnaires
- Community Sessions/Forums/Dialogues
- Project Update Reports to the Police Services Board
- Feedback & Focus Group Sessions

- Co-host a Focus Group
- Sign-ups for a Ride Along with Traffic Police
- Project Updates with Feedback/Survey Mechanisms
- Community Participation in Quality Assurance Reviews
- Project Update Reports to the Police Board
- COMPAC & CPAC Meetings
- Surveys & Questionnaires
- OPA-OPS Sessions for Members
- Social Media Forums
- Project Presentations

The TSRDCP and the research team sought to encourage a sense of community ownership over the race data project in part to ensure confidence in Ottawa's racialized community about the reliability of the research process and the data collected so as to strengthen the validity of the findings. Important steps to facilitate a sense of community ownership were put in place.

- Defining clearly the aims and parameters of the consultation.
- Engaging with the key participants and stakeholders in the consultation.
- Choosing the appropriate range of methods to engage all stakeholders in the consultation.
- Using strategies that maximize people's ability to participate.
- Ensuring coordination and avoid duplication.
- Providing regular updates on project progress.
- Informing people about opportunities to provide input and feedback.
- Providing feedback on the outcome of the consultation and resulting decisions to all participants, and to groups with an interest.

These steps enabled the TSRDCP internal management and the researchers to capitalize on the relationships developed with CPAC members to raise the profile of the project, build and maintain interest, raise awareness, and stimulate dialogue on the issues. In effect, data collection and analysis in the TSRDCP provided a structure for the OPS to work collaboratively with communities to combat racial profiling, and contribute to the non-bias policing goals of the Service.

CONCLUSIONS

What differentiates the TSRDCP from other OPS community engagement initiatives lies in the cross-over from crime control into service integrity. The TSRDCP extended the vision of community engagement and strategic partnerships beyond the usual parameters of effective law enforcement into areas of quality service delivery and policing integrity; adding more nuance and breadth to the community engagement model. OPS community engagement initiatives before the TSRDCP have had a significant impact on various aspects of community development – in areas such as victim assistance, youth issues, gang problems, and so on. Community engagement in the race data study turns the lens back on the OPS and provides an opportunity for a kind of institutional self-examination; and genuine commitment to progressive organizational change. The result has been that community engagement not only benefited the TSRDCP, it has also generated an important broader discussion about race, race-based data collection and bias-free policing in Ottawa.

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