

# Community Views on Criminal Justice: Quarter 4 Report

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## COMMUNITY VIEWS ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE: Quarter 4 Report

The Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI)'s Community Views on Criminal Justice project records public perception of policing and the criminal justice system in Rochester, NY. This quarterly report discusses results from three focus groups<sup>1</sup> on community relations and procedural justice. Research findings lay the basis for actionable recommendations to improve police-community relations. Groups surveyed include one community organization<sup>2</sup> (a life-skills training group), one neighborhood organization (a Northwest neighborhood association), and one police-citizen group (from Southeast Rochester). Results indicate:

- 1) Many participants had contact with the RPD in the past six months. Neighborhood association and police-citizen groups reported more positive interactions than the life-skills training participants. All groups reported communication as a key factor in good police-citizen interactions with supervision, officer attitude, and the outcome of an interaction as other important factors.
- 2) Though most participants lived in high-crime neighborhoods, groups felt safe in their neighborhoods at night. Feelings of safety are attributed to familiarity, an internal confidence, and certain aspects of the neighborhood. Violence and slow RPD response times contributed most to participants feeling unsafe. Police presence increased two groups' feelings of safety.
- 3) Overall, groups were satisfied with police responses to community concerns. The police-citizen group was satisfied with their section captain, yet respondents were dissatisfied with how the police department is run. Another group believed that slow RPD response times show that RPD does not care about the community. All groups

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<sup>1</sup> The current quarter reflects year two of this project, in which only one group per month will be interviewed.

<sup>2</sup> In this project, "community organizations" include respondents from across the city of Rochester; in contrast, "neighborhood organizations" have participants from a geographically bound area.

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viewed violence as a major problem throughout Rochester. Drug dealing and corner stores are more localized concerns for two groups.

- 4) Most participants trust police to do what is best for the community, though a few said that police and citizens are against each other. Respondents believed transparency and communication will help increase trust between police and the community.
- 5) Groups were more negative about the criminal justice system doing what is best for the community compared to police doing what is best. Participants were most critical of prison, probation and the court systems. Respondents agreed even less that the justice system treats people fairly, with money as the most commonly noted factor against fairness. Most groups felt that neighborhoods bear the negative impacts of justice system ineffectiveness. All groups want to see rehabilitation as an outcome of the justice system.
- 6) While groups generally agreed that officers are fair in the way that they enforce the law, one group was divided regarding if police generally treat people with dignity and respect. Many in this group felt that minorities are at higher risk for unfair treatment. Communication, officers understanding community members, and equal enforcement were reported as important for fairness, dignity and respect.
- 7) Almost all groups agreed that body-worn cameras are good for the relationships between police and the Rochester community, though the neighborhood associations' discussion indicated a negative stance towards cameras. Neighborhood participants' thought that cameras were a waste of money and were more for safety than relationship-building. Similar to other quarters, groups thought cameras will increase accountability, yet fear mishandling of cameras and footage.

### Interaction with Police

*Questions: Have you had any contact or interaction with a member of the Rochester Police Department (RPD) in the past 6 months? Would you describe your most recent interaction with the police as good, bad, neither good nor bad, or no interaction? Did the interaction with the police get started by you calling or approaching the police or the police approaching you?*

The majority of quarter four participants had contact with the RPD in the past six months. All participants in the neighborhood and police-citizen groups approached RPD or called 911, and all reported their interactions as good. While the neighborhood group mostly interacted with officers at meetings, police-citizen participants called to report issues. In contrast, the majority of the life-skills training group did not have contact with RPD in the previous six months. Of those in this group who did interact with officers (38%), most initiated the contact yet the majority judged the interactions as bad.

Communication was reported as a very important part of police-citizen interactions by all three groups. Life-skills training participants described good interactions as times when officers listened to what they had to say. Neighborhood respondents reported positive interactions as cooperation between citizens and officers, and mentioned strong communication is the key for trust and collaboration. Police-citizen respondents said officers' and the section captain's follow-up on issues and accountability have led to strong relationships with these individuals. This group also reported how beat officers assigned to their neighborhoods know the area and the young people who "cause trouble" in the community.

Other factors that contribute to good interactions with officers include officer attitude, the outcome of an interaction, and supervisor oversight of officers' performance. Positive outcomes were important to life-skills training participants (i.e. not getting a ticket, not getting arrested) whereas getting the issue resolved was most important to neighborhood respondents.

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The neighborhood group felt that officers' having a positive attitude and response affects interactions (i.e., not acting annoyed at being part of a situation or meeting, and not being a "smart-ass"). Respondents also believed a "good" interaction is affected by the citizen's attitude and supervisor oversight. One participant reported a negative interaction with an officer to his/her new supervisor, and the officer's behavior changed reportedly because the "previous supervisor was very relaxed; this [new] supervisor is on top of it."

### **Safety**

***Question: How safe do you feel in your neighborhood at night?***

The majority in all three groups reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods at night, though one person in the life-skills group and one person in the police-citizen group felt unsafe to very unsafe. The majority of participants in the neighborhood and life-skills groups, and about half of the police-citizen group, lived in high-crime neighborhoods. The neighborhood group reported that their adult children would like them to move out of the area (perhaps in part due to their age) though participants did not have interest in moving.

Groups reported that safety comes from familiarity, certain aspects of the neighborhood and an internal sense created by the individual. Neighborhood participants felt safe from being aware and cautious of their surroundings at night as well as being familiar with their neighborhood. Participants from a few groups shared they would not feel as safe at night in a neighborhood they did not know. Police-citizen respondents described how they walk outside and monitor the area where they live. One person shared that her house had been burglarized but, "I don't harp on it because I don't want to live in fear." Life-skills training participants reported that certain aspects of their neighborhood (i.e. living near a police station, far from the "inner-city," or in a gated community) increased their feelings of safety. Neighborhood

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participants said abandoned houses made them feel unsafe since they are used by drug dealers, though participants stated: “Drug dealers are not going to bother me unless I bother them.”

Police presence increased most groups’ feelings of safety. The majority of life-skills participants felt safer with patrols in their neighborhoods, and police-citizen respondents said their partnership with police helps them feel safer and in control. In contrast, the neighborhood group reported that RPD is often not in their neighborhoods, so police presence makes them curious and concerned about a potential problem or crime.

Violence and slow RPD response times were the factors that most contributed to feeling unsafe. As one participant stated, “Every year it [violence] gets more and more. They do it during the day now; they don’t care what time of day it is.” Slow response times was a unanimous concern of life-skills training participants. One respondent described an incident when her family member was shot next to his pregnant wife and the police took a half an hour to respond. Some people believed Irondequoit police respond much faster due to having more officers on shift at a time (life-skills training participants). Similarly, neighborhood association respondents felt that there are not enough RPD officers.

### **Community Concerns and Trust**

***Questions:*** Overall, how satisfied are you with police responses to community concerns? (Responses range from very satisfied to very unsatisfied.) Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with these statements: I trust the police to do what is best for the community. Overall, the criminal justice system (police, courts, probation, prisons, parole, etc.) tries to do what is best for the community.

The police-citizen and neighborhood groups were satisfied with police responses to community concerns. The life-skills training group was equally split in responses though conversation highlighted more dissatisfaction. The police-citizen group reported satisfaction with their section captain’s responsiveness to their concerns but dissatisfaction with how the

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police department is run (i.e., too few officers harms ability to respond to community concerns, and officers' role limited by administration and existing laws).

All groups reported violence as a problem throughout the city of Rochester. The police-citizen and neighborhood groups discussed local issues of drug dealing and corner stores selling drug paraphernalia (police-citizen participants) or not keeping outside areas clean (neighborhood participants). The neighborhood group was also concerned about prostitution, abandoned houses and littering. Respondents in multiple groups noted that some issues are not the responsibility of police, and believed neighbors' collective action is needed to address problems yet said it has sharply declined in recent years.

As mentioned above, response time was the main factor impacting satisfaction with RPD responses to community concerns for life-skills training participants. Some respondents said that slow response times shows RPD does not care about the community. One participant named the police as a community concern since, "They seem unwilling to change, unwilling to bend."

### **Trust in Police?**

The police-citizen and neighborhood groups reported trusting the police to do what is best for the community. Both groups have worked with police to address neighborhood problems in the past and engage the police by reporting issues. The neighborhood group felt that communication is a key for trust building. Some police-citizen participants said they have to trust the police because they need the police.

Two groups noted how current media stories strain police-community relations by making police seem less trustworthy. The neighborhood group felt people should not be generalized these incidents to all officers' behavior. In contrast, the life-skills training group

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said that issues of police brutality have been a problem for decades. The life-skills training group was equally split between agreement and disagreement about trusting the police to do what is best for the community, with a few people in strong disagreement. A few people described feeling divided from police: “We are one community and they are another.”

### **Increasing Trust in Police**

Life-skills training participants agreed they would have more trust in police if the department was transparent with their strategies and why they undertake these strategies. Many participants felt that when officers do not explain why they are pulling someone over it makes them feel that officers have a hidden agenda. Respondents also wanted RPD to have more community programs and initiatives in order to show they care for the community. Police-citizen participants wanted officers to talk to neighborhood residents to “break down the barriers” between the police and the community.

### **Justice System Not Doing What is Best**

The life-skills and police-citizen groups were equally split between agreement and disagreement that the criminal justice system tries to do what is best for the community. Money, skin color and/or nationality were all seen as greatly influencing the system (life-skills training and neighborhood groups). Neighborhoods were also seen as negatively impacted by the failings of the system (police-citizen and neighborhood groups). One group reported frustration that some people who are released commit new crimes within 24 hours. Two groups were also critical of prison and probation for not rehabilitating people and often increasing criminality or addiction issues (life-skills and neighborhood groups).



### **Dignity, Respect and Fairness**

***Questions:*** *Rate how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements: Police officers in my community are generally fair in the way they enforce the law. The police in my community generally treat people with dignity and respect. The criminal justice system generally treats people fairly.*

The neighborhood and police-citizen groups agreed that that police officers are fair in the way they enforce the law, and that officers generally treat people with dignity and respect. While the majority (75%) of the life-skills group believed officers are fair in enforcement, half disagreed that police generally treat people with dignity and respect.

### **Fairness**

Groups thought that understanding, communication, and equal enforcement are important for fairness, dignity, and respect. Neighborhood respondents report that fair treatment involves officers' having a general understanding of living in the city as well as why you are calling (i.e., the issues and your reasoning). These respondents also believed fairness depends on treating community members the same despite differences. Similarly, life-skills participants wanted officers to enforce the same rules for all citizens (i.e., family or friends' of officers should not receive better treatment during traffic stops). Police-citizen participants focused more on enforcement, and reported wanting a curfew to get young people off the streets at night. These participants believed that open communication between officers and the community is important for dignity and respect. Similarly, the neighborhood group believed dignity/respect has to be earned by both officers and citizens, and reported frustration with citizens who do not respect the job of police (i.e., does not do what an officer tells them during a police-citizen interaction).

### **People Treated Less Fairly by RPD**

Most groups said certain people are treated unfairly by police. The neighborhood association reported that chronic callers are treated differently by the police and said they are seen as “a nuisance” rather than helpful to RPD. The life-skills training group felt that minorities are often treated differently by officers. Participants report that RPD stereotypes people based on appearance (i.e., skin color) and reputation. One person witnessed a fight between a Black and White man in downtown that ended with the police breaking up the fight. The officer would not listen to her that she saw the white man start the fight; the white man was allowed to walk away and the black man was arrested, which the whole group saw as unfair. Another participant believed children who witness these types of unfair situations often grow up with rage and trauma, which is likely to continue the cycle of distrust between police and minority citizens.

### **Justice System Unfairness**

Though the police-citizen and neighborhood groups agreed that justice system generally treats people fairly, both groups’ discussion held strong critique of the system. Neighborhood participants saw the criminal justice system as a “big business” with shareholders, and the police-citizen group wanted the system to be transparent and communicate with the community. Almost all life-skills participants disagreed that the justice system generally treats people fairly. These respondents reported seeing the system frequently treat people differently depending on money, status, and appearance/skin color (i.e., for one participants’ family, people assume they are African American then they are actually Afro-Latino). Neighborhood participants believed that people with mental illness and/or disabilities are treated negatively in prison and wanted them to be in treatment instead. Most respondents said prisons should focus on rehabilitation.

### **Body-Worn Cameras**

***Question:*** *Rate how much you agree or disagree with this statement: The use of body-worn cameras is good for the relationship between police and this community.*

The life-skills training participants and police-citizen group agreed that the use of body-worn cameras is good for the relationship between police and this community. These groups thought camera footage will increase accountability by documenting the behavior of both police and citizens. Respondents also believed body-worn camera footage would be better than a citizen recording, which often begins in the middle of a situation and is filmed from a distance. Neighborhood participants reported being hopeful that footage will also assist court proceedings on incidents. The life-skills group expressed concerns over possible mishandling of cameras and footage (i.e., turning around to avoid filming an event or bumping the camera button and turning it off), but felt cameras will benefit the community more than RPD.

In contrast, neighborhood group participants reported neutral answers on the survey yet discussion revealed overall negative views. Respondents thought cameras will not improve police-community relations and may be a waste of money. One participant stated: “I didn’t know it [body cameras] were for increasing community relations; thought it was to catch the assholes. I thought it was for police protection.” The group reported hoping cameras may increase officer and community member safety.

### **Discussion**

This quarter started the second project year in which fewer groups will be interviewed each month<sup>3</sup>. Similar to groups of the same type<sup>4</sup> interviewed in previous quarters, the police-citizen and neighborhood association groups have collaborated with and tend to be more

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<sup>3</sup>Information on year two project goals can be found in Appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2 for a complete list of groups interviewed since the beginning of this project.

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supportive of police than other groups. The life-skills training group was less satisfied and trustful of RPD, due in part to having poorer experiences with officers and likely since the group was comprised of mostly racial/ethnic minority individuals.

Distrust of police seems impacted by the demographic of one's neighborhood. Most participants this quarter lived in high-crime neighborhoods, yet only those from the life-skills group (predominately a minority group) say they felt less safe because of slow RPD response times. Slow response times likely decrease Rochester's minority communities' ability to rely on the police and further strain police-community relations.

Similar to previous quarters, violence and drugs/drug markets continue to be some of the most pressing community concerns. All quarter four respondents wanted safer neighborhoods with better quality of life. Most participants saw these problems as not being addressed by the justice system as whole. They believed neighborhoods unfairly bear the negative consequences of the systems' inability to address these problems. All participants pointed to the lack of rehabilitation for offenders' as contributing to issues such as prostitution, drugs, and violence.

Finally, the neighborhood groups' negative views towards body-worn cameras were unique compared to almost all groups interviewed in year one of this project. Most groups tend to be positive or neutral about cameras. Neighborhood participants' focus on body cameras increasing safety rather than affecting police-community relations was also unique view. Discussion with this group indicated strong criticism for a lack of listening to those in authority (i.e., children not listening to parents, and citizens not doing what police say during a police-citizen encounter). Participants ages may contribute to these views, as their generation was likely raised with a higher level of respect for authority than many other groups with participants of younger ages.

### **Actionable Recommendations**

Here we present recommendations for the justice system and RPD based on concerns and suggestions raised across all focus groups from this quarter.

- 1) **The most strained relationships noted were with minority communities. RPD should attempt to respond more quickly to calls in minority and high-crime neighborhoods.** Prioritizing calls that come from high crime and/or minority communities will help rebuild trust that the police can be relied on to assist with community problems. Officers responding consistently with quick response times will assist with rebuilding trust between RPD and minorities in Rochester.
- 2) **Transparency is key for increasing trust in police. The department should consider regular information campaigns to report back to the community. Individual officers need to clearly explain the reasons for their actions and decisions to people they stop.** RPD should be more transparent with what strategies they are using to address problems and why they undertake these specific strategies. Groups that trust police note that trust has been built over time through communication and follow through about issues raised. Using media sources that target minority groups (i.e., the Minority Reporter and WDKX) are good formats to reach these target audiences. In one-on-one interactions, officers need to be more transparent about their decisions. Officers should always explain why they have stopped someone and appeal to the citizen's reasoning skills.
- 3) **Strong communication skills are important for dignity/respect and fairness. RPD managers should monitor those they supervise for strong verbal and nonverbal communication skills.** Officers should listen to community members and strive to

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understand their specific situation as well as their reasons for actions they take. A positive attitude and showing understanding are important attributes for officers to adopt, and attempting to resolve issues even if there is follow-up needed is important for community member satisfaction. Supervisors should also monitor officers' use of these approaches in police-citizen interactions and/or meetings with community members.

- 4) **RPD needs to continue to show care for the community, and must publicize programs and/or events.** Respondents believed more community programs and initiatives will illustrate RPD's care for the community. Ongoing programs are also important as they allow relationship development more than single events. Officers also need to be walking their beats for the purpose of talking to residents and business owners in neighborhoods. One group also discussed their pleasure that beat officers eat at restaurants in their assigned neighborhoods, which participants felt showed officers as a part of the community they police. These strategies should especially be the focus in minority and/or high-crime neighborhoods as it will "break down the barriers" between the police and neighbors.
- 5) **Challenged neighborhoods fare the worst when the justice system fails. Justice system agencies should partner with community agencies for reform toward rehabilitating offenders.** Community agencies have many resources needed to rehabilitate offenders. More direct, stronger links between the justice system and such agencies are likely to assist those who are justice-involved. National justice reform should also consider how best to reform and enhance the system for public safety.

### **Appendix 1: Methodology - Demographics**

Fourth quarter focus groups were held from July to September 2016. Due to researchers' use of group feedback analysis, individualized demographic information was not collected (more information can be found in the Community View on Criminal Justice: Methodology paper). General group demographic and descriptive information are listed below by group type and each group's subcategory.

- **Focus group seventeen: Neighborhood Organization<sup>5</sup>- participants from a neighborhood group in NW Rochester** (3 participants). All participants were women over the age of 50, Caucasian, and everyone lived in the city of Rochester.
- **Focus group eighteen: Community Organization – life-skills training participants** (8 participants). All but two participants were women, half of participants' ages ranged from 18 to 39, half of the group was Black/African American with about 25% Latino and the remaining Caucasian; and almost all lived in the city.
- **Focus group nineteen: Police-citizen Organization - participants from SE Rochester** (4 participants). All participants but one were women, approximate age ranged from 50 to older than 65, three were Caucasian, and all participants lived in the city.

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, for this project “community organizations” include respondents from across the city of Rochester; in contrast, “neighborhood organizations” have participants from a geographically bound area.

## **Appendix 2: Methodology - Groups**

Groups were recruited to meet the goal of interviewing a wide variety in types of groups in the Rochester community (i.e., community versus reentry groups or various in geographic location). Community groups represent all of the Rochester community; in contrast, neighborhood groups are geographically bound (i.e., community organizers in NE Rochester neighborhoods). The group's subcategory provides more information on what brings the group together and makes participants similar.

August of 2016 began year two of the Community Views of Criminal Justice project. In year two, one focus group per month allows further analysis and dissemination of results (i.e., police-community discussion and/or community conversations, and reports relating results to procedural justice practices).



**Table 1. Types of Groups Interviewed by the Community Views of CJ Project**

<b>Focus Group Number</b>	<b>Type of Group/Organization</b>	<b>Group Subcategory<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Total Participants</b>
1	Reentry	Reentry organization staff	8
2	Youth	At-risk youth organization staff	12
3	Youth	At-risk youth organization staff in Northeast Rochester	2
4	Youth	At-risk youth organization staff	7
5	Community	Life-skills training participants	8
6	Reentry	Reentry participants	9
7	Youth	Young people from Northwest Rochester	9
8	Neighborhood	Community organizers in Northeast Rochester	5
9	Police-Citizen	Police-citizen group from Southeast Rochester	5
10	Community	Reform-advocacy group	4
11	Community	Reform-advocacy group	3
12	Community	Life-skills training participants	9
13	Community	Reform-advocacy group	4
14	Police-Citizen	Police-citizen group from various areas of Rochester	4
15	Neighborhood	Neighborhood group in Northeast Rochester	8
16	Neighborhood	Business associations from Southwest Rochester	9
17	Neighborhood	Neighborhood group in Northwest Rochester	3
18	Community	Life-skills training participants	8
19	Police-Citizen	Police-citizen group from Southeast Rochester	4

<sup>6</sup> The Rochester city quadrant is listed only for groups that are made up of people from a particular geographically area or serve a population in a specific area.

**Appendix 3: Focus Group Survey Questions with Corresponding Results**

**1) Have you had any contact or interaction (by phone, office, car, on the street, etc.) with a member of the Rochester Police Department (RPD) in the past 6 months?**

Responses	Yes	No	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	64%	36%	14
Total Percentage from all Quarters	74%	26%	107

**2) How did the interaction with the police get started?**

Responses	I called 911	A police officer approached me	No recent interaction	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	57%	7%	36%	14
Total Percentage from all Quarters	40%	29%	31%	105

**3) Would you describe your most recent interaction with the police as...**

Responses	Good	Bad	Neither good nor bad	No contact	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	53%	13%	0%	33%	15
Total Percentage from all Quarters	44%	16%	15%	26%	109

**4) How safe do you feel in your neighborhood at night?**

Responses	Very safe	Somewhat safe	Somewhat unsafe	Very unsafe	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	40%	47%	7%	7%	15
Total Percentage from all Quarters	36%	46%	10%	8%	111

**5) Overall, how satisfied are you with police responses to community concerns?**

Responses	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	21%	50%	21%	7%	14
Total Percentage from all Quarters	6%	35%	35%	24%	110

**6) I trust the police to do what is best for the community.**

Responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	13%	53%	20%	13%	15
Total Percentage from all Quarters	5%	34%	38%	23%	113

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**7) Police officers in my community are generally fair in the way they enforce the law.**

Responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	13%	67%	20%	0%	15
Total Percentage from all Quarters	6%	43%	37%	14%	110

**8) The police here generally treat people with dignity and respect.**

Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	20%	53%	27%	0%	15
Total Percentage from all Quarters	9%	35%	37%	19%	111

**9) Overall, the criminal justice system (police, courts, probation, prisons, parole, etc.) tries to do what is best for the community.**

Responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	0%	53%	47%	0%	15
Total Percentage from all Quarters	4%	31%	40%	25%	107

**10) The criminal justice system generally treats people fairly.**

Responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	0%	36%	64%	0%	14
Total Percentage from all Quarters	0%	20%	47%	32%	99

**11) The use of body-worn cameras is good for the relationship between police and this community.**

Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N
Quarter 4 Percentage	42%	25%	25%	0%	8%	12
Total Percentage from all Quarters	31%	31%	30%	4%	4%	100