

Bakersfield Community Engagement

Community engagement is a foundation of the Stipulated Judgment (Judgement) which directed the appointment of a Monitor. The Parties to the Judgment include the City of Bakersfield, the Bakersfield Police Department and the California Department of Justice. The Monitor's role is detailed within the Judgment and our job is to measure and report on the Bakersfield Police Department's (BPD) progress under the provisions agreed to within the Judgment.

The Monitor held two community listening sessions on May 10 and 11, 2022. The goal was to continue the engagement with the Bakersfield community and to further discuss policing concerns and ideas to improve relations between the police and the community.

Members of the Bakersfield Police Monitoring Team (Team) facilitated the sessions. The Team conducted outreach ahead of the meetings, through direct contact, email notices and media notice. Each of the sessions was held in a different location to make it easier for community members to attend. While attendance was limited, this allowed the community members present to have rich discussions about the issues they face with BPD and to share their ideas for improving police relationships. The Monitor agreed to publish a summary of the themes identified in these discussions.

The attendees at the sessions were thoughtful and identified several ways in which the BPD and the Bakersfield community can know one another better.

The Team appreciates the thoughtful discussion, insight and recommendations provided from the Bakersfield community.

Session Overview

Each session began with an introduction to the Team, an overview of the stipulated agreement and a summary of the progress of the Monitor to date. The Team then led a facilitated discussion centered on the following questions:

- What police services do you expect from the BPD?
- What can the BPD do to improve its relationship with the community?
- What can the Team do to keep the community informed and ensure that the views of the community are represented?

Session Summary

Overall, community members agreed that BPD should enhance its engagement with the community through improved interactions, focus on service and better communication with the people they encounter – regardless of the type of encounter.



The information below summarizes the reflections and opinions community members expressed during the sessions related to the following topics.

Experiences with the BPD

Participants discussed their personal experiences with and general feelings toward the BPD. They expressed concerns over the following topics, among others:

- The BPD's use of excessive force, inappropriate searches, profiling and other harassment, which has caused people to leave Bakersfield, generally fear any police encounters and distrust the BPD.
- Community members' fears of calling the police because of the above issues and other issues.
- The BPD's need to respond to high-priority crimes, which the community acknowledged but said decreased the BPD's presence in the community that they expect as residents.
- The BPD's nonresponsiveness to general business and community needs, which might be a result of the Department focusing on violent activity within the city.

Action for the BPD to Take

The participants expressed that they expect the BPD to engage in efforts to increase safety in the community. Many participants indicated that this focus will require a cultural change within the BPD. Discussion focused on the need to implement procedural justice throughout the organization and increasing trust, fairness and legitimacy through constitutional policing and equitable and bias-free policing practices. Participants expressed general comments about the actions required of the BPD and stated the Department needs to:

- Mitigate the use of force and eliminate unlawful or pretextual stops and searches.
- Create a culture in which people do not fear the police.
- Ensure an equitable response and service to all of Bakersfield's communities.
- Operate with respect, empathy and compassion toward community members.
- Improve transparency and engagement with all communities.
- Respect community and cultural values and norms in the different communities of Bakersfield.
- Listen and improve community relations. Specifically:
 - The chief and the command staff need to hear community members' experiences with the BPD.
 - Department members need to actively listen to community member concerns and speak with community members in a non-confrontational manner.



- Focus on respectful, two-way communications. Participants recognized that community members also need to engage in respectful conversations with the police. They stated the community and the BPD must be ready to have difficult conversations that can sometimes become uncomfortable.
- Make its officers available to the community so the officers and the community can get to know each other better.
- Work with the community to increase the opportunities for both and to solve problems collaboratively.

Opportunities for Improvement

Participants discussed next steps and opportunities that the BPD can make to improve policing and community relationships in Bakersfield. They discussed topics relating to training, community outreach and trust.

Participants stated that training could help engagement between the BPD and the community, including training in the following areas:

- Leadership training for BPD supervisory and command staff
- Cultural awareness training
- Crisis intervention teams
- Engaging with youth
- Victim-focused interviewing, e.g. (trauma-informed training)
- Anti-bias training

Participants also identified actions the BPD can take to improve community outreach and trust-building, including:

- Acknowledging the wrongs committed by BPD officers and apologizing for them.
- Ensuring that BPD officers and command staff demonstrate interest and empathy for the concerns of the community, specifically, improving engagement and empathy when dealing with impacted persons and their families (e.g., crime victims, family members of victims of violence, persons experiencing mental illness, unsheltered persons).
- Implementing proactive community engagement and problem-solving in conjunction with residents.
- Developing cultural awareness and sensitivity to viewpoints that differ from those of the officer or the BPD.



Specific Topic Discussions

In addition to the general themes above, community members identified specific improvements the BPD can make to better engage with its communities.

- Improve transparency by sharing more details about the BPD's budget, performance and priorities to provide residents the opportunity to provide input.
- Increase community member involvement in police accountability and oversight.
- De-couple law enforcement duties from other public safety and non-emergency issues that are not crimes and provide funding for alternative responses, such as dealing with persons experiencing mental illness or unsheltered individuals, and use a multi-disciplinary approach to these issues.
- Reallocate funding to address quality of life issues.
- Enhance language access, especially improving the availability of language access during street encounters. Increase the number of officers who speak the diverse languages spoken within the community.
- Provide additional clarification to community members regarding the jurisdictions of the BPD and the Kern County Sheriff's Office.
- Remove police from schools.
- Overhaul the Youth Explorer program to include teaching participants about constitutional policing, procedural justice and related topics.
- Review and eliminate policies and practices reflecting bias.
- Review the gang member identification form and database.
- Improve dispatcher training, necessary qualifications and communication skills, as dispatch is often a community member's first encounter with police.
- Improve initial encounters with residents and stop asking people about their probation or parole status.
- Ensure comprehensive background checks are conducted for BPD members, and address concerns regarding whether white supremacists are in the Department.

Monitor Engagement with the Community

Participants also provided the following suggestions on how to improve the Monitor's engagement with the community:

- Share as much information as possible with the community regarding the progress of the BPD and the Monitor's activities.



- Conduct outreach to community youth, community members and unsheltered community members where they live.
 - This might include shadowing people from community-based organizations for a day to understand the community more fully. Such actions would also provide the opportunity to speak with community members and learn more about the community culture.
- Ask community-based organizations to sponsor listening sessions.
- Focus Monitor priorities on officer engagement and communication skills.
- Incorporate community feedback into the Monitor's reports.