



U.S. Department of Justice
Community Relations Service

Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships Program in Erie, Pennsylvania

Case Study

February 2022

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In April 2018, the Community Relations Service (CRS) delivered the Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP) facilitated dialogue program in Erie, Pennsylvania.

The goals of the SPCP program are to engage local law enforcement and community leaders in dialogue to identify issues and solve problems collaboratively, increase local capacity, develop partnerships, and develop local solutions to local problems. The program is also designed to help local leaders address longstanding community distrust and other historical barriers that hinder police-community partnerships and to improve trust and develop partnerships between law enforcement officers and the diverse communities they serve.

Approximately 80 diverse leaders participated in the Erie SPCP program, representing local youth, refugees, faith groups, law enforcement, social services groups, business and community groups, and civil rights organizations. During the program, participants identified issues impacting police-community relations and then developed solutions to address each issue. Each stakeholder group selected representatives to participate in the Erie SPCP Council, which was tasked with implementing the solutions. The Erie SPCP Council has met once a month since April 2018.

In May 2021, CRS conducted a case study to identify the impacts and outcomes of the Erie SPCP program and Erie SPCP Council on police-community relations. In addition, the case study measured the collaborations among Erie city officials, the police department, and community leaders. These outcomes and impacts were identified by analyzing data collected from online surveys and during interviews.

Findings

Impacts on Police-Community Relations, Tensions, and Capacity

This executive summary highlights the impacts that most closely align with police-community relations, including perceptions of:

- ▶ Improved trust between community members and police,
- ▶ Decreased racial tensions in the community,
- ▶ Improved relationships between community members and police, and
- ▶ Increased community capacity.

The following tables summarize the survey responses CRS received from participants in the SPCP program, other invited stakeholders, and members of the SPCP Council.

As shown in **Table 1**, a greater percentage of respondents rated their perceptions of community trust in the police and police-community partnerships in Erie as *good* or *very good* in 2021 than they responded they would have in 2018. In addition, a lesser percentage of those respondents rated racial tensions in Erie as *high* or *very high* than they responded that they would have in 2018.

Table 1: Perceptions of Racial Tensions, Police-Community Partnerships, and Trust		
	2018	2021
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of police-community partnerships as <i>good</i> or <i>very good</i>	6.7%	37.9%
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of community trust in police as <i>good</i> or <i>very good</i>	7.4%	29.6%
Percentage of participants rating racial tensions as <i>high</i> or <i>very high</i>	62.9%	46.1%

Table 2 summarizes the survey responses CRS received from participants relating to their perceptions of improved community capacity in Erie to independently prevent and respond to conflicts and implement actions to strengthen police-community relations in the future.

Table 2: Perceptions of Improved Community Capacity	
Percentage of participants who <i>agreed</i> or <i>strongly agreed</i> that city and police leadership improved their capacity to prevent and respond to conflicts	86.2%
Percentage of participants who <i>agreed</i> or <i>strongly agreed</i> that SPCP Council members improved their strategic planning and implementation skills	90%

Erie SPCP Council Success in Addressing Issues

Of the respondents, 75% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the actions of the council successfully addressed identified issues in the community.

Percentage of 20 respondents who <i>agreed</i> or <i>strongly agreed</i> that the actions of the council successfully addressed the issues, tensions, and conflicts identified during the SPCP program	75%
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Four respondents also noted that the council members—both law enforcement and community members—discussed the issues, tensions, and conflicts during council meetings. One participant stated, “Without the council, we may have spent a significant number of years without educating the other side. Before SPCP, these conversations did not take place.”

Actions Implemented by the Erie Police Department

The case study evaluated the outcomes of the SPCP program and the SPCP Council’s implementation efforts. Specifically, this case study focused on actions taken by the Erie Police Department (PD) and other city officials to implement solutions to address the four prioritized issues identified during the SPCP program. This section includes a summary of those four issues and actions taken for each issue.

Issue #1	The police department needs more education and support around cultural awareness of the community.
Actions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provided cultural diversity and sensitivity training and implicit bias training to Erie police officers. ▶ Completed implicit bias training during SPCP Council meetings with other council members. ▶ Partnered with a local professor to provide classes to city officials and officers regarding cultural and racial sensitivity. ▶ Partnered with the New American Council and the Erie Asian Pacific American Association to improve communication and trust with these communities. ▶ Hosted public forums to educate the community on police practices and to learn about issues impacting the community. 	

Issue #2	The police department needs additional community-focused policing practices and policies.
Actions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Required body cameras for every police officer. ▶ Increased foot patrols and patrols of areas of concentrated crime. 	

Issue #3	The police department does not represent the diverse makeup of the community.
Actions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hired a full-time recruiter to focus on increasing the diversity of people of color and women in the department. ▶ Distributed brochures and cards to different places of worship and community centers to advertise job openings. 	

Issue #4	The police department needs more outreach and engagement with youth.
Actions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Conducted outreach with youth in the community, including arranging for ice cream trucks in underserved neighborhoods, distributing face masks, playing basketball with youth in the Police Athletic League. ▶ Conducted an SPCP-type facilitated dialogue program with youth in the community focused on youth and police relations. 	

Perceptions of CRS’s Services

Table 3 summarizes the survey responses CRS received relating to perceptions of the services CRS provided to the Erie community. Survey responses indicated that a majority of council members *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that CRS provided the council with tools to sustain and implement actions and that CRS met the council’s facilitation needs.

Table 3: Perceptions of CRS Service to Support the SPCP Council

Percentage of Erie SPCP Council members who <i>agreed</i> or <i>strongly agreed</i> that CRS provided the council with tools to sustain the council and implement actions	68.8%
Percentage of participants who <i>agreed</i> or <i>strongly agreed</i> that CRS’s facilitation of the Erie SPCP Council’s meetings met the council’s needs	82.3%

Table 4 summarizes the survey responses for the recommendation of the SPCP program. Almost 96% of all respondents recommended the CRS SPCP program to other cities and towns.

Table 4: Recommendation of the SPCP program

Percentage of respondents who <i>agreed</i> or <i>strongly agreed</i> that they would recommend the SPCP program to other cities and towns	95.7%
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Methodology

The case study includes data from 37 respondents: 29 online survey participants and 8 interview participants. CRS used surveys and interviews to evaluate the level at which the program participants and SPCP Council members—both law enforcement and community members—implemented the actions and solutions to address the issues identified during the SPCP program. In addition, the case study measured the collaborations among Erie city officials, the police department, and community leaders, as well as respondents’ perceptions on various police-community relations topics.

Surveys

CRS distributed 75 online survey invitations to SPCP program participants, participants who were invited but did not attend the program, and current and former council members. CRS received 29 survey responses: 12 from council members, 12 from program participants, and 5 from invited participants.

Interviews

CRS conducted eight virtual interviews with Erie SPCP Council members who represented law enforcement and community leadership. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed for themes and trends.

Report

1.0 Introduction

In April 2018, the Community Relations Service (CRS) delivered the Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP) facilitated dialogue program in Erie, Pennsylvania.

The goals of the SPCP program are to engage local law enforcement and community leaders in dialogue to identify issues and solve problems collaboratively, increase local capacity, develop partnerships, and develop local solutions to local problems. In addition, the program is designed to help local leaders address longstanding community distrust and other historical barriers that hinder police-community partnerships and to improve trust and develop partnerships between law enforcement officers and the diverse communities they serve.

In 2018, the city of Erie committed to strengthening trust between the police department and the local diverse communities. At the invitation of Erie's law enforcement leaders and city officials, CRS met with city and county officials, a diverse group of community leaders, and others to identify potential services and resources to support the community. These meetings resulted in the city of Erie requesting that CRS deliver the SPCP program.

In early 2018, CRS convened a local SPCP planning group that included city officials, police department leaders, and community leaders. The group was tasked with planning all aspects of the program, including identifying program participants; identifying a date, time, and location; and developing the program agenda and guiding questions.

After several months of planning, the Erie SPCP program was held on April 21, 2018. Approximately

80 diverse leaders participated, representing local youth, refugees, and representatives of Erie faith groups, law enforcement, social services groups, business and community groups, and civil rights organizations. Each stakeholder group selected representatives to participate in the Erie SPCP Council, which was tasked with implementing the solutions.

During the SPCP program, participants identified and prioritized issues impacting police-community relations and then developed solutions to address each issue. The prioritized issues identified the need for the police department to do the following: (1) receive more education and support around cultural awareness of the community, (2) develop more community-focused policing practices and policies, (3) work on ensuring that the police department is more representative of the diverse makeup of the community, and (4) conduct more outreach and engagement with youth. Page 20 of this report cites the actions and solutions taken by the SPCP Council, the Erie police department (PD), and local officials for these four issues.

The SPCP Council

2.0 The SPCP Council

Since 2018, the SPCP Council has met on the first Wednesday of every month. The purposes of the SPCP Council are to:

- ▶ Include voices of key community stakeholders to implement the solutions by creating an action plan,
- ▶ Increase understanding and communication between law enforcement and community leaders,
- ▶ Act as an advisor to law enforcement and community leaders on community relations issues, and
- ▶ Increase local capacity to proactively identify and address future community conflicts and tensions.

The Erie SPCP Council includes representation from the city, police leadership, the district attorney's office; the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania; the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); African American Concerned Clergy (AACC); the United Clergy of Erie, the New American Council; LGBTQ+ Advisory Council; Latino community leaders; youth leaders; and community members to implement actions to strengthen police-community relationships.

Part of the way the SPCP Council structured its work was by creating committees that each focused on implementing different solutions to the prioritized issues identified during the 2018 SPCP program: education around cultural awareness, additional community focused policing practices and policies, increased community representation in the police department, and outreach to youth.

Three committees planned actions around the following themes:

- 1. Facilitated Dialogue Series to Build Trust:** Council members hosted breakfasts with students at schools and participated in dialogues with students. The facilitated dialogues included guiding questions with the students about building trust, identifying the students' perceptions about law enforcement, and requesting areas in which the students need mentoring.
- 2. Snack Patrol Events:** The council members partnered with a local business to deliver snacks in an ice cream truck to underserved Erie neighborhood youth.
- 3. Answer the Call Series:** The purpose of the SPCP Council's "Civic and Community Engagement Answer the Call" series is to increase the diversity of the police department. The series provide an opportunity for residents to learn about the Erie PD hiring process from the SPCP Council members, the city's community partners, and the Erie PD recruitment officer. The goal is for interested individuals to develop a plan to become a police officer.

SPCP Council members collaborated with the following community partners in their work to strengthen police and community relationships:

- ▶ African American Concerned Clergy (AACC)
- ▶ Booker T. Washington Center
- ▶ Boys and Girls Club of Erie, Inc.
- ▶ Charter Schools of Excellence
- ▶ Erie Public Schools
- ▶ Historically Black Affiliation Advisory Council
- ▶ John F. Kennedy Center
- ▶ LGBTQ+ Advisory Council
- ▶ Martin Luther King Center
- ▶ Multicultural Community Resource Center
- ▶ National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- ▶ New American Council
- ▶ United Clergy of Erie
- ▶ Urban Erie Community Development Corporation
- ▶ Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Greater Erie

SPCP Case Study

3.0 SPCP Case Study

In May 2021, CRS conducted a case study to identify the impacts and outcomes of the Erie SPCP program and the work of the Erie SPCP Council on police-community relations. These outcomes and impacts were identified by analyzing data collected from online surveys and interviews.

The case study used online surveys and virtual interviews to evaluate the level at which the program participants and SPCP Council members—both law enforcement and community members—implemented the actions and solutions to address the issues identified during the SPCP program. In addition, the case study measured the collaborations among Erie city officials, the police department, and community leaders.

The survey asked participants for their perceptions of police and community capacities to prevent and respond to conflict, perceptions of the level of racial tensions in Erie, and perceptions of local police and community relationships. In addition, the survey asked all participants to identify the most significant impacts and outcomes of the Erie SPCP program, as well as the successes, challenges, and outcomes of the Erie SPCP Council. The participants also responded to questions regarding the services and support provided by CRS.

The case study includes data from 37 respondents: 29 from surveys and 8 from interviews.

Surveys

CRS sent out 75 online survey invitations to SPCP program participants, invited participants, and current and former council members. Of the online survey invitations sent, CRS received 29 online survey responses: 12 from council members, 12 from program participants, and 5 from invited participants.

Interviews

The CRS evaluation team conducted eight virtual interviews with Erie SPCP Council members who represented law enforcement and community leadership. The interview questions were identical to the online survey questions. All interviews were translated verbatim and analyzed for themes and trends.

Findings

4.0 Findings

This section describes the impacts of the SPCP program and the work of the SPCP Council from 2018 – 2021. The impacts include the change in participants’ perceptions, action-based outcomes, related findings, and increased problem-solving capacity.

4.1 Change in Perceptions

This section highlights the changes in survey participants’ perceptions, including the following:

- ▶ Improved trust between community members and police,
- ▶ Decreased racial tensions in the community,
- ▶ Improved relationships between community members and police, and
- ▶ Increased community capacity.

Perceptions of SPCP Program Improving Police-Community Relations

Survey participants and interviewees cited that the SPCP program and SPCP Council helped to open lines of communication and break down barriers between the community and police department.

SPCP Program and Improved Police-Community Relations

One participant stated, “The SPCP program helped to establish a necessary communication between local leaders, council members, and city officials to tackle an issue that is significant to the community.” Another program participant confirmed the breaking down of barriers because of the

SPCP program, writing, “It helped to have conversations regarding the specific topics. Both sides expressed important considerations some of which were not easily seen by each side.” An additional program participant observed, “Of course, this is three years ago, but I see relationship growth. The opportunity to express concerns in a positive and reflective manner.”

Four interviewees cited increased collaboration between community members and the police following the SPCP program. One interviewee stated that law enforcement now consults with community members on issues and rumors, such as seeking the community’s input for upcoming press releases. As one police officer stated in the interview, “There used to not really be any interaction between the community and law enforcement. You can see the differences now with the interactions with the children and their parents, and just people asking the hard questions and getting a response.”

SPCP Council and Improved Police-Community Relations

Nine council members mentioned that the SPCP Council is a critical factor for the program’s success. Three program participants said that they would recommend the SPCP program for its ability to open lines of communication between the police department and community. Three council members indicated that the sharing of the results of their implicit bias and diversity assessments during one council meeting resulted in greater awareness of each other’s biases and increased trust between council members. Another council member stated, “Perceptions of the police department in our city started to change when the relationships were being built on the SPCP Council.”

Perceptions of Community Trust in Police

The percentage of participants rating perceptions of the community trust in police as *good* or *very good* increased from 7.4% in 2018 to 29.6% in 2021.

	2018	2021
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of community trust in police as <i>good</i> or <i>very good</i>	7.4%	29.6%

Survey responses indicated that community members have more confidence and trust in interacting and communicating with police officers than they recalled having in 2018. One respondent indicated that there is now an avenue for community and police discussion with better communication and trust. Another respondent stated that the community and Erie PD are able to work together in a more trusting environment and added “I feel it is safe to say that some of these community members and police officers would not have been able to join forces and work together [without SPCP].”

Another respondent stated that the community does not fear when they see a police officer in uniform. because the police are now wearing body cameras that show the actions of the police as well as community members on camera. One interviewee cited that she felt confident to approach the police to patrol a place of worship, and the police agreed to patrol the area.

Three respondents cited the work that the police are doing to establish trust with the community. “We have the Police Athletic League which is awesome. The kids go home and speak so highly of who they interact with that a lot of parents have actually come to the school to meet some of these officers.” In addition, one police officer stated, “We actually get people to come up and talk to us now and feel more comfortable. They didn’t feel like they had to run because we (the police) were coming around.” Another community leader stated, “The visibility of the police [providing services] other than policing has increased.”

Perceptions of Racial Tensions

The percentage of participants rating perceptions of racial tensions as *high* or *very high* decreased from 62.9% in 2018 to 46.1% in 2021.

	2018	2021
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of racial tensions as <i>high</i> or <i>very high</i>	62.9%	46.1%

Three program participants cited that community outreach, the SPCP program, community and police department actions, and the work of the SPCP Council helped decrease the perceived levels of racial tension. One interviewee cited the “national narrative” around policing is a factor in not having a larger decrease in the perceptions of racial tensions in Erie.

Perceptions of Police-Community Partnerships

The percentage of respondents rating perceptions of the strength of police-community partnerships as *good* or *very good* increased significantly after the SPCP program.

	2018	2021
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of police-community partnerships as <i>good</i> or <i>very good</i>	6.7%	37.9%

Program participant respondents reported increased positive perceptions between the police department and community after the SPCP. One respondent shared, “The change in the police department is most noticeable—they trust this [SPCP] program.” Another expressed, “Law enforcement is putting in the work. It has truly changed their perspectives. It’s changed the way they view their work, their life, their interactions with the community, and it’s shown.”

Perceptions of Relationships with Community Groups, Local Officials, and Police Department

CRS asked respondents how they perceived the strength of their relationships with community groups, local officials, and the police department in 2018 and in 2021. More than 80% reported the perceived strength of their relationships with all these groups as *good* or *very good* in 2021, essentially the same as or better than they recalled it being in 2018. The following tables indicate the perceptions of relationships for each group.

Perceptions of Relationships with Community Groups

The perceptions of the strength of respondents’ relationships with community groups increased from 70.4% reporting *good* or *very good* relationships prior to the SPCP program to 85.1% in 2021.

	2018	2021
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of their relationships with community groups as <i>good</i> or <i>very good</i>	70.4%	85.1%

Perceptions of Relationships with Local Officials

The perceptions of the strength of respondents’ relationships with local officials remained about the same with 88.9% reporting them as *good* or *very good* prior to the SPCP program to 88.8% in 2021.

	2018	2021
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of their relationships with local officials as <i>good</i> or <i>very good</i>	88.9%	88.8%

Perceptions of Relationships with Police Department

The perceptions of the strength of respondents’ relationships with the police department increased from 74% reporting them as *good* or *very good* prior to the SPCP program to 81.4% in 2021.

	2018	2021
Percentage of participants rating perceptions of police-community partnerships as <i>good</i> or <i>very good</i>	74%	81.4%

4.2 Action-Based Outcomes to Address Top Issues

This section highlights the outcomes that local officials, community leaders, and Erie SPCP Council members implemented for the four issues prioritized by SPCP program participants:

Issue #1

The police department needs more education and support around cultural awareness of the community.

Actions: Members of the Erie police department and SPCP Council attended cultural diversity and sensitivity training and implicit bias training to address concerns about the perceived lack of cultural awareness. They also partnered with a local professor to provide classes to city officials and officers regarding cultural and racial sensitivity.

Erie police officers participated in community events like National Night Out and Coffee with a Cop in addition to speaking at a vigil to support the muslim community after mosque shootings in New Zealand in 2019. Together, Erie police department leadership and the mayor met with different community groups and partnered with the New American Council and the Erie Asian Pacific American Association (APAA) to improve communication and trust with these communities.

Issue #2

The police department needs additional community-focused policing practices and policies.

Actions: After the SPCP program, the Erie PD purchased body-worn cameras for every police officer, increased foot patrols, began patrolling more areas of concentrated crime, and increased engagement with the community and youth. Erie PD leadership implemented a community-based policing model, and the police department hosted forums to educate the community on the new department policies and learn about issues impacting the community.

Issue #3

The police department does not represent the diverse makeup of the community.

Actions: The police department hired a full-time recruiter to increase the department's diversity. In 2020, the Erie Police Department set a goal to increase the number of diverse candidates, including women and non-white candidates, taking the written and physical agility tests, to 15% of all test takers. That year, the police department exceeded this goal by 12 percentage points with diverse candidates comprising 27% of all test takers, and in 2021, the police department exceeded this goal by 20 percentage points with diverse candidates comprising 35% of all test takers.

Issue #4 The police department needs more outreach and engagement with youth.

Actions: Nine respondents cited efforts to build relationships with Erie’s youth. Police officers and council members took ice cream trucks to neighborhoods, played basketball with youth in the Police Athletic League, talked with youth, and scheduled youth-based activities. They conducted an SPCP-type facilitated dialogue program with youth in the community focused on youth and police relations.

4.3 Capacity Building

This section describes respondents’ perceptions of improved capacities of law enforcement, the community, SPCP Council members, and SPCP planning group members.

Perceptions of Improved Capacities of the Police Department and City

Respondents perceived that city and police leadership have improved their capacities to reduce conflict and prevent violence. A larger percentage of council members, versus other program participants, agreed that these capacities have improved.

Ratings of Council Members: Of the 18 council members who responded, 94.4% of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that city and police leadership have improved their capacity to prevent and respond to conflicts because of the work of the SPCP council.

Percentage of council members who *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that city and police leadership have improved their capacity to prevent and respond to conflicts because of the work of the SPCP Council.

94.4 %

Ratings of Non-Council Members: Of the 7 program participants who responded, 71.4% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the city and police leadership improved their capacity to prevent and respond to conflicts because of the SPCP program.

Percentage of program participants who *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the city and police leadership improved their capacity to prevent and respond to conflicts because of the SPCP program.

71.4 %

Perceptions of Improved Skills of SPCP Council Members

Of the 20 respondents, 90% *agreed or strongly agreed* that the strategic planning and implementation skills of the SPCP Council members improved over the council’s meetings.

Percentage of program participants who <i>agreed or strongly agreed</i> that the strategic planning and implementation skills of the SPCP Council members improved over the council’s meetings.	90.0%
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Perceptions of Improved Skills of the SPCP Planning Group

The findings indicate that 64.3% of respondents *agreed or strongly agreed* that the event planning skills of the SPCP planning group improved over the course of the planning group’s meetings. However, 100% of all respondents who served as planning group members *agreed or strongly agreed* that the event planning skills of the SPCP planning group improved over the course of the planning group’s meetings.

Percentage of respondents who <i>agreed or strongly agreed</i> that the event planning skills of the SPCP planning group improved over the course of the planning group’s meetings.	64.3%
Percentage of the responding planning group members who <i>agreed or strongly agreed</i> that the event planning skills of the SPCP planning group improved over the course of the planning group’s meetings.	100%

Fourteen respondents answered this question, with those who did not observe the planning group’s meetings responding with “neither agree nor disagree.”

4.4 Success of Erie SPCP Council

Erie SPCP Council Success in Addressing Issues

Of the 20 respondents, 75% *agreed or strongly agreed* that the actions of the council successfully addressed the issues, tensions, and conflicts identified during the SPCP program.

Percentage of 20 respondents who <i>agreed or strongly agreed</i> that the actions of the council successfully addressed the issues, tensions, and conflicts identified during the SPCP program	75%
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Four respondents also noted that the council members—both law enforcement and community members—discussed the issues, tensions, and conflicts during council meetings, and each group expressed thoughts relating to police-community relations and racial tensions not previously understood by other groups, especially after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. One participant stated, “Without the council, we may have spent a significant number of years without educating the other side. Before SPCP, these conversations did not take place.”

CRS Success in Providing Tools and Facilitation

Almost 70% of council members *agreed or strongly agreed* that CRS provided the SPCP Council with tools to sustain the council and implement actions. In addition, almost 83% of the responding council members agreed or strongly agreed that CRS’s facilitation of the meetings met the council’s needs.

Percentage of the SPCP Council members who <i>agreed or strongly agreed</i> that CRS provided the SPCP Council with tools to sustain the Council and implement actions	68.8%
Percentage of the SPCP Council members who <i>agreed or strongly agreed</i> that CRS’s facilitation of the SPCP Council’s meetings met the council’s needs	82.3%

The survey responses and interviews offered the following ways in which CRS provided the council with tools and facilitation to sustain the council and implement actions.

1. One respondent indicated that CRS established a framework and structure to build the program and council, with another participant noting, “We would have been lost without that help.” CRS emphasized the need to build relationships to sustain the momentum and enthusiasm of the council.
2. CRS shared expertise and skills in facilitating and identifying the needed resources to sustain the council and implement actions. One respondent noted “[CRS] demonstrated and exhibited trust, neutrality, and objectivity especially with the different stakeholders.” Another respondent, observed “If not for CRS, we wouldn’t have been able to identify those needs and solutions.” The conciliator facilitated the council discussion to identify a clear vision and process for the SPCP Council to be successful. At times, CRS had to mediate different viewpoints.
3. CRS shared ideas and tools with the council members, such as an action planning template, agenda templates, example topics, and a task checklist. CRS also modeled best practices for conducting council meetings such as using basic facilitation skills, facilitating engagement from each council member, and ensuring that each council member had an active role.

- 4. CRS facilitated the first two council meetings. For the subsequent meetings, CRS passed the role of the meeting facilitator to a council member. During the next three years, CRS stayed in consistent contact with the city of Erie and offered expertise and guidance to support the council’s work.

Participants’ Recommendation of SPCP Program:

Over 95% of the survey and interview respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the SPCP program to other cities and towns.

Percentage of respondents who <i>agreed</i> or <i>strongly agreed</i> that they would recommend the SPCP program to other cities and towns.	95.7%
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Five program participants and nine council members who completed the survey explained their reasons for recommending the SPCP program, most of which related to the fact that the program provides the opportunity to develop and implement solutions to address community and law enforcement issues, tackle community problems, and establish communication between all parties.

One respondent commented, “Every community needs an SPCP program.” Three participants expressed that the Erie SPCP program provided a process that focused on the unique issues impacting police-community relations in Erie, and not on the “national narrative” surrounding controversial police shootings. Another respondent stated that the SPCP program goals set the stage to strengthen and unite the community and law enforcement to work together.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

5.0 Challenges And Lessons Learned

Challenges

The case study provided an opportunity for the SPCP Council, city officials, police department leaders, and community groups to identify challenges they faced as they worked to implement solutions to the issues identified during the SPCP program.

The respondents cited challenges that included:

1. Meeting logistics (managing meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, finding a meeting time that was good for everyone, and maintaining long-term attendance at council meetings)
2. Change management (obtaining buy-in from some groups about the SPCP Council's work, building relationships and trust with new members on the council, and maintaining open communication during times of stress between the SPCP Council, the community, and the police department)

Lessons Learned

The case study also provided an opportunity to identify ways to improve future SPCP programs, including the following:

SPCP Program Design

1. **Provide orientation sessions for the community and police officers.** Following the Erie SPCP program, CRS recognized the need to provide an orientation session for community

leaders and police officers prior to the SPCP program. CRS now provides this session to clarify the goals of the SPCP program, the role of participants, the program agenda, and offer to an opportunity for participants to ask questions.

2. **Offer relationship-building sessions for participants before the SPCP program.** CRS can offer a session focused on relationship building between program participants before the SPCP program. This session would allow participants to meet each other and begin developing relationships prior to discussing difficult topics, such as race and policing.

SPCP Council

1. **Develop trust and relationships.** The SPCP council should focus on developing trust and relationships between council members during their early meetings and then again for new members joining the council. These relationships will be critical to facilitate open dialogue and develop actions to address the sensitive issues facing the council. CRS can offer a session focused on relationship and team building between SPCP council members before their first council meeting. The session would allow participants to develop relationships and become oriented to their role as council members.
2. **Develop meeting procedures.** The SPCP council should develop written meeting procedures to help create structure for future meetings and create clear expectations for council members. The document should include procedures for identifying future council members, communications to the public, recordkeeping, decision-making methods, and other issues.
3. **Clarify role of SPCP council.** City and police leadership should clarify the role of the SPCP council to the public. It should be clear to the community that the role of the council is to serve as an advisor to the city and leadership on police-community relations issues.
4. **Develop yearly goals.** The SPCP council should facilitate a yearly strategic planning session to develop short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals. The strategic plan will help the council stay focused on critical priorities and develop actions to address the priorities.
5. **Identify strategies to keep the momentum.** It is not uncommon for volunteer groups like the SPCP council to lose momentum or dissolve after changes in leadership. The SPCP council should identify strategies to navigate changes in city and police department leadership to enable it to keep moving forward.
6. **Increase council communication to the community.** The SPCP council should develop a communications plan to share information with the community about the role of the council, the collaborative actions between the council and police department, new police policies and procedures, and other relevant information.

7. **Provide sustained support to the SPCP council.** The Erie SPCP program also reinforced the need to provide short-term and long-term support to the council. CRS now facilitates the first several SPCP council meetings to help stand up the council and increase its likelihood of success. During these meetings, CRS provides the council with tools, such as action planning and agenda templates to help the council organize its work. Finally, CRS maintains regular contact with the council and attends their meetings.
8. **Identify and support the meeting facilitator.** Finally, CRS recognized the need to identify, in collaboration with the SPCP council, a person to take on the role of meeting facilitator. CRS now supports the new facilitator by providing sample meeting agendas and coaching to overcome challenges presented in the council meetings.

Conclusion

6.0 Conclusion

SPCP is one important tool that communities can utilize to address the recurrent historic sources of tensions that can impact police-community relations. CRS stands ready to support communities working to tackle these critical issues.

Questions?

For questions and additional information, please contact CRS Program Manager, Christopher Chalberg, at Christopher.Chalberg@usdoj.gov or submit a question to AskCRS@usdoj.gov.



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