



Assessment of the Grand Rapids Police Departments Implementation of the Recommendations from the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

Background

In 2017, the City of Grand Rapids contracted with 21st Century Policing Solutions, LLC ("21CP") to facilitate the work of the Grand Rapids Police Policy and Procedure Review Task Force - an advisory body created by the Mayor and City Commission in response to racial disparities identified in a 2017 traffic-stop study conducted by Lamberth Consulting.

As part of this contract, the City also tasked 21CP with assessing the Grand Rapids Police Department's (GRPD) efforts in implementing the recommendations from the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing ("Task Force"). 21CP has a unique perspective on these recommendations as all of the consultants participating in this contract and assessment were directly involved in the work of the Task Force.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of our assessment and outline key findings and recommendations. A comprehensive chart that outlines GRPD's efforts for each of the specific recommendations in the Task Force will be included in the final report of the Grand Rapids Police Policy and Review Task Force which will be provided to the City in November.

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

In 2014, amid significant police and community tension stemming from several high profile Officer-Involved shootings of unarmed black young men, President Obama created the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

According to President Obama, the purpose of the Task Force was to:

"...examine how to strengthen public trust and foster strong relationships between local law enforcement and the communities that they protect, while also promoting effective crime reduction."

The Task Force identified six pillars, or major categories, to frame its work and group its findings and recommendations. Below is a list of the six pillars:

1. Building Trust and Legitimacy
2. Policy and Oversight
3. Technology and Social Media
4. Community Policing and Crime Reduction
5. Training and Education
6. Officer Safety and Wellness

Listening sessions were held for each pillar in which the Task Force received oral and written testimony for hundreds of experts, elected officials, criminal justice experts and leaders, and community and civil rights advocates. In May 2015, the Task Force released its final report and identified a series of recommendations and action items for each of the six pillars.

This assessment evaluates GRPD's efforts in embracing the core principles of 21st century policing, as well as their efforts in implementing the specific recommendations outlined by the President's Task Force. Not all Task Force recommendations apply to local jurisdictions.

In conducting this assessment, 21CP conducted interviews of GRPD command staff, participated in ride-alongs with rank and file officers, reviewed key GRPD policies, reports, and practices, and received community input through public venues conducted during this process.

Overall Assessment

It is our opinion that GRPD has made notable efforts in adopting key 21st century principles and in implementing several of the recommendations outlined in the final report of the President's Task Force.

Below is a list of key findings of specific actions taken by GRPD.

- Chief Rahinsky was one of approximately 500 law enforcement leaders across the country (this is out of 16,000 police agencies in the United States) to travel to Washington, DC, and participate in one of several White House briefings 21st century policing.
- In 2016, GRPD launched the use of body cameras with a pilot program. The program went department-wide in 2017. All sworn officers are now outfitted with body cameras.
- In 2018, GRPD received national accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). Less than 10 percent of the over 16,000 agencies in the United States have achieved this accreditation. Many of the requirements required by CALEA are consistent with Task Force recommendations.
- GRPD has begun a process of sharing more data with the community. Most recently, GRPD published many operating polices online. We recommend this effort be expanded through participation in the National Police Foundation Open Data Initiative.
- GRPD has provided implicit bias training to all members of the department. This training coupled with the adoption of the 38 recommendations of the Grand Rapids Task Force on Police Policy and Review Task Force should assist in reducing disparate outcomes and improving police and community relations.
- In 2018, GRPD developed a "Youth Policy" to specifically address officers interactions with youth and to provide guidance on issues such as the use of restraints on minors and parental notification. It should be noted that GRPD engaged the community in the development of this policy, including receiving input from the Chief's Youth Advisory Body and the Police Policy and Review Task Force.
- The City and GRPD have made the hiring of a qualified and diverse workforce a priority. The strategies and processes utilized by the City are both innovate and consistent with industry best practices. This area received praise from the Grand Rapids Police Policy and Review Task Force. We recommend the City and GRPD continue this effort.

Areas in Need of Improvement

We believe the Department needs to make immediate and sustained improvements under Pillar 4: Community Policing and Crime Reduction. Although GRPD has taken significant efforts at community outreach, most of these efforts are primarily programs and events based.

According to the Task Force report, "Community policing cannot be a program, unit, strategy or tactic. It must be the core principle that lies at the foundation of a police department's culture. The only way to significantly reduce fear, crime, and disorder and then sustain these gains is to leverage the greatest force multiplier: the people of the community."



True community policing requires the police and community become co-producers of public safety, which only occurs when the community has a voice in all facets of police operations, including the development and implementation of crime reduction strategies.

The Grand Rapids Police and Policy Task Force made a similar finding and provided a specific recommendation for the GRPD "...to develop a citywide community policing plan that incorporates crime reduction strategies, community engagement and partnerships, and police department oversight." We agree with this recommendation as it is consistent with the following Task Force recommendations.

Recommendation 4.1 states:

Law enforcement agencies should develop and adopt policies and strategies that reinforce the importance of community engagement in managing public safety.

Recommendation 4.2 states

Community policing should be infused throughout the culture and organizational structure of law enforcement agencies.

The other area of concern falls under Pillar 2: Policy and Oversight. GRPD's policies are consistent with industry best practices, especially those developed as part of the accreditation process. However, there is a significant gap when it comes to civilian oversight.

We applaud the city leadership for its creation of the Police and Policy Review Task Force. The community's participation in this group and its involvement in its work represents a significant step in empowering the community and underscores the benefit of community oversight. We believe it is critical that the City and GRPD work with the community to identify and adopt a civilian oversight model that best fits the Grand Rapids community. This is also consistent with Task Force Recommendation 2.8, which states:

Some form of civilian oversight of law enforcement is important in order to strengthen trust with the community. Every community should define the appropriate form and structure of civilian oversight to meet the needs of that community.

Recommendations

Below are key recommendations we believe will assist the City and GRPD in implementing the Task Force recommendations and in achieving 21st century policing.

- Full implementation of the 38 recommendations of the Grand Rapids Police Policy and Review Task Force. These recommendations are consistent with key areas outlined in the President's Task Force report.

The recommendations were provided under six key categories:

- Staffing and Deployment
- Internal Affairs (Accountability)
- Training
- Youth Policy (this was added at the request of the police chief)
- Community Policing and Crime Reduction
- Recruiting and Hiring

As GRPD implements these recommendations, it is also critical that they, as recommended by the President's Task Force, acknowledge the role of policing in past and present injustice and discrimination and how it is a hurdle to the promotion of community trust.

- Full implementation of the recommendations outlined in the "Lamberth" report.

- Greater community involvement in policy development, training (design and delivery), and police oversight.
- The City initiate a collaborative process to adopt the best community oversight model to ensure the residents have a voice in all aspects of police operations, including the adoption of crime strategies and tactics, training, accountability, and equipment and technology use.
- GRPD should provide regular updates to the Commission and the public on its efforts to implement the aforementioned recommendations.
- Expand the publishing of open data, including all stop and arrests data, use of force, community complaints, and body camera footage of critical incidents.
- Full adoption of community oriented policing and the use of evidence-based crime reduction strategies.

Closing

Many of the positive efforts made by GRPD were also identified by the Police Policy and Review Task Force. Progress is being made. However, there is much more work to be done, and the accomplishments thus far represent a start and a solid foundation on which to build.

We are confident that the police department will become a national leader and model in 21st century policing with the continued support and guidance from the city leadership, true engagement and partnership with the community, and a steady commitment to adopt the recommendations from the President's Task Force, 21CP, and the City's Police and Policy Review Task Force.

Most importantly, these efforts must be conducted with participation, guidance and oversight from the community.