

Grand Rapids Police Department



Response to the 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 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.

The City tasked 21CP with assessing the Grand Rapids Police Department's efforts in implementing the recommendations from the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

The Task Force identified six pillars, or major categories, to frame its work and group its findings and recommendations.

First Pillar: Build Trust and Legitimacy

The Task Force recommended that police officers adopt the guardian concept of policing, in contrast with the idea of the officer as warrior. They emphasized the importance of accountability and transparency in police actions and engaging in activities other than enforcement that can promote a positive image of law enforcement.

Second Pillar: Policy and Oversight

The Task Force suggested that police departments ensure that their policies reflect the values of their communities and that specific policies address issues like the use of force, public demonstrations, and de-escalation. They also recommended peer reviews of critical incidents and external, independent investigators assigned to questionable uses of force and in-custody deaths.

Third Pillar: Technology and Social Media

Technology offers tremendous potential for police departments to better interact with their communities, increase transparency and accountability, and improve safety and security for civilians and officers alike. The Task Force strongly suggests maximizing the use of technology to improve how police do their jobs on a day-to-day basis.

Fourth Pillar: Community Policing and Crime Reduction

Policing a community requires involvement and engagement with the community. The Task Force recommended that police departments recommit to community oriented policing strategies to improve community relations and take a more holistic approach to addressing crime.

Fifth Pillar: Training and Education

The Task Force encouraged the federal government to foster partnerships with training centers across the country and facilitate more consistent training and standards. They also recommended forming training hubs to encourage innovation, community engagement in training and a national postgraduate institute of policing.

Sixth Pillar: Officer Wellness and Safety

Police work is inherently dangerous and can even be potentially hazardous to officers' health. The Task Force recommended implementing "scientifically supported shift lengths" and building on research into officer-related deaths and critical injuries.

The assessment evaluated the GRPD's efforts in embracing the core principles of 21st Century Policing, as well as its efforts in implementing the specific recommendations outlined by the President's Task Force.

Areas in Need of Improvement

The assessment recommended improvements under **Pillar 4: Community Policing and Crime Reduction.**, specifically:

Recommendation 4.1:

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

Recommendation 4.2:

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

The Grand Rapids Police Department has a long history of embracing community policing. Community policing is both a mindset as well as an organizational structure. The GRPD patrol function is broken down into five service areas. Each service area has a Captain assigned. The Captain serves as the central point of contact for identifying and addressing community concerns. Utilizing dedicated community oriented policing specialists, each service area's unique needs and concerns are addressed.

Officers attend community meetings, visit schools, organize baseball leagues (On Base) and spend time at the Boys and Girls Clubs. These avenues, along with many others, create relationships based on shared experiences and trust.

Recently *The Policing Project*, a group from the New York University School of Law, visited Grand Rapids for three days. Project researchers met with police, residents, local leaders and community groups to better understand the City's community engagement efforts. According to Brian Chen, senior program manager for the Policing Project, "Grand Rapids is an example of a city and community groups seriously engaging in what they want policing to look like. It was remarkable to us. It was impressive and clear that there was a role for everyone to play in this."

That doesn't mean that the GRPD is content with the progress made. We are committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide progressive, professional, and responsive policing to residents and visitors to Grand Rapids.

The other area identified in need of improvement 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. The Task Force recommended that the City and GRPD work with the community to identify and adopt a civilian oversight model that best fits the Grand Rapids community.

Recommendation 2.8:

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.

The Grand Rapids community has a variety of ways in which they provide direction and oversight to the GRPD. The nine member Civilian Appeals Board, (CAB) was established by the City Commission in 1996 to review the findings of the Internal Affairs Unit (IAU), which looks into citizen concerns about the actions of GRPD employees. The CAB is responsible for reviewing IAU findings on complaints of:

- Use of excessive force
- Falsification and lying
- Civil rights violations
- Hostility, discourtesy or other conduct unbecoming of a police officer when such conduct is committed in a context of animosity or prejudice based on race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation or national origin.

In 2016-17, a total of 33 IAU investigations were eligible for appeal and review by the CAB. The board received and heard a total of four appeals. In all four cases, the CAB affirmed the IAU findings, which included Unfounded, Not Sustained and Exonerated. The cases included

complaints of improper traffic stop, falsification/lying, racial profiling, civil rights violation and improper search.

The CAB can affirm, reverse or modify the findings of the IAU. It also can send a case to the City's Labor Relations Department, to conduct additional interviews or gather more information. The CAB cannot impose or recommend disciplinary actions.

The Board's bylaws spell out its duties and responsibilities, which include:

- Encouraging compliance with rules and regulations concerning the conduct of police officers during interactions with citizens
- Encouraging individuals who believe they have been mistreated by police officers to use GRPD's internal complaint process to have the officers' conduct reviewed
- Creating a process that fairly evaluates the conduct of everyone involved to determine whether a breach of department rules and regulations has occurred
- Giving the community a sense of confidence that it has a voice in reviewing the actions of police officers

The CAB is comprised of Grand Rapids residents, who serve two-year terms. The CAB members are appointed by the Mayor and City Commissioners.

Additionally, the Community Relations Commission, consisting of nine members appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the City Commission, is entrusted with providing insight to elected officials in adopting measures ensure community harmony. The CRC provides community education to prevent discriminatory practices.

Ultimately, the City Commission represents the people of Grand Rapids. Voters elect their representatives. Grand Rapids has three wards, and each ward elects two City Commissioners. The Mayor is elected by all Grand Rapids voters.

The Public Safety Committee was formed to consider and make recommendations on *all* matters concerning public safety. Currently, the Committee consists of three commissioners and six community members.

As we move forward, the Public Safety Committee should become more active in providing civilian oversight of the police department. The GRPD recognizes that a diverse and forward thinking Grand Rapids requires a transparent and accountable police department. The structure needed to move forward currently exists. It will be incumbent on all stakeholders, community, police officers, and elected officials to optimize the existing avenues to ensure a police department that is one with the community it serves.