

Police model: embedded community liaison and monthly meeting with a Multicultural Advisory Committee

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police August 6, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

The information gathering continues.

Gadfly is no expert. He knows of models in Eugene and St. Petersburg and will go there next. Let him know what you know about interesting programs so that he can share.

Here's an embedded community liaison and a Multicultural Advisory Committee.

Multicultural—

You've seen Gadfly wonder about the Mayor jumping to participation with the NAACP Community Advisory Board (working details still not thoroughly explained to the public) when 30% of the City is Latinx. Odd?

from Mara Klecker and Kim Hyatt, "Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center now stand as police reform model." Star Tribune, August 3, 2020.

As Twin Cities suburbs look for ways to foster trust between law enforcement officers and communities of color in the wake of George Floyd's death, some are looking to a long-standing model that began years ago in the north metro.

Formed with new immigrants in mind, the Joint Community Police Partnership began in 2005 in Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park, two of the most diverse cities in the state. Since then the partnership has gained national recognition and grown into a collaboration with Bloomington,

Crystal, Hopkins, Richfield and St. Louis Park, as well as Hennepin County.

The goal remains the same: develop communication and understanding between officers and diverse residents. Each police department has an embedded community liaison, and police officials meet monthly with a Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) made up of residents.

The committees of volunteers have advised police on body camera policies and helped them understand consulate ID cards carried by immigrants. They've helped inform hiring practices and crafted more inclusive interview questions. And they've organized community events to bring officers into diverse spaces.

The members have also advised on ways to educate immigrants about local law enforcement and helped resolve cultural misunderstandings as simple as staying in the vehicle when pulled over by an officer — something that many Liberian immigrants, for example, had thought was disrespectful.

“This work has to involve both sides,” said Elba Guille Garza, a Latina real estate agent who has served on Bloomington’s MAC for three years. “We need to know how the police department works and they need to understand how our community works.”

Many issues addressed by the partnership’s community liaisons fall somewhere between police work and social work, said Hennepin County Commissioner Mike Opat, who Drier credits for championing the partnership since its start.

“This has created different venues for interactions between the police and various communities that aren’t just always on the street,” Opat said.

Brooklyn Center Police Cmdr. Rick Gabler said those relationships and the work of the committees have become especially critical amid the calls for police reform.

Revering said the Crystal MAC is continuing to talk about police reform. The department is looking to make its use-of-force data more transparent to residents, as well as making the department's policy manual easier to find on the city's website.

Brooklyn Park Deputy Police Chief Mark Bruley said his city's MAC group "really take[s] the temperature of the community" while allowing residents to see behind the curtain of police work.

Brooklyn Park's MAC, in partnership with the city's Human Rights Commission, has recently started looking at police reform recommendations. Proposals include the creation of a civilian oversight board and hiring nonwhite officers who live in the city.

"There's always room for improvement," Issahak said. "[The committee] is so important because if we don't have this, then it would be like a black hole: no communication, no flow of information."

Garza is one of two Latinos on the Bloomington MAC. While the MAC model is a good one, she said, it's dependent on involvement and hinges on trust and awareness that builds over time.

"We are that community connection, the bridge of trust," Garza said. "But improving that trust is difficult. I now see how the police do want to listen and learn, but they need that input."