

## Strengthening Police-Community Relationships

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015, I attended a one day conversation in Strengthening Police-Community Relationships, as a part of the Critical Issues in Policing Series held by The Police Executive Research Forum in Washington D.C.

Founded in 1976 as a nonprofit organization, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) is a police research and policy organization and a provider of management services, technical assistance, and executive-level education to support law enforcement agencies. PERF helps to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development.

170 police chiefs and community leaders attended the gathering. The police chiefs were encouraged to invite a community leader that was neither their biggest enemy, nor biggest advocate, but someone who had integrity in the community.

Chuck Wexler, Executive Director of PERF facilitated the discussion.

The meeting began with everyone sharing his/her name and affiliation.

Then for approximately two hours, the community leaders—which included Bernice King and Floyd Flake, answered the following questions: How would you characterize the current state of police-community relations? How do the various communities in your area perceive your local police, and do they have similar or different perceptions of police agencies nationally? What factors (local and national) have contributed to these perceptions? What is the most significant obstacle to developing effective police-community partnerships? What are the best ways to build effective police-community relationships? Are there examples of successful efforts?

Each speaker was given about two minutes.

So many people wanted to speak, that Mr. Wexler gave another hour to community leaders after the break.

Then the facilitator gave an hour for police chiefs to speak. The police chiefs answered the following questions: What is your current assessment of the police-community relationship in your area? What are the attitudes and perceptions of your police officers regarding the public and community members? How do officers' perceptions affect their daily interactions with the public? What are the most significant challenges from a police perspective to building more effective relationships? Are there examples of successful efforts to help bridge gaps in police-community relationships?

After lunch, the facilitator read back to the group “take aways” that his staff had recorded from the conversations.

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Then for the last hour, the facilitator opened the floor for anyone to speak on the following questions: What are the common issues, challenges, and observations across the country regarding police-community relationships? What are the promising practices for establishing and strengthening police-community relationships? What are the important next steps for the police and community members to take?

A few of the issues that were touched on included implicit bias, this country's history of systemic prejudice, the importance of community policing, the impact of the national media upon local police departments, and the importance of creating more opportunities for police and the community to interact with each other.

After verifying the quotes that were captured, PERF will release a report on the meeting.