

## Building Trust between Police and Communities in Oceanside

Since January 2017, the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (Kroc IPJ) at the University of San Diego has been working alongside faith and community leaders in San Diego County to improve relationships between law enforcement and communities through the Building Trust Partnership (BTP). The goal of the project is to create cohorts of San Diego leaders working to reduce violence and improve community safety by restoring trust between communities and police, trust that is essential to creating strong, resilient, peaceful communities.

Beginning in 2018, the Kroc IPJ began working in Oceanside, CA to improve the connections and strengthen relationships between the communities of Oceanside and the Oceanside Police Department (OPD). To this end, the Kroc IPJ undertook a number of activities to better understand the state of police-community relations with the goal of sharing this information with OPD to inform their policing.

In November 2018, the Kroc IPJ hosted a community consultation attended by nearly 50 individuals. Recognizing a lack of representation from Oceanside's Hispanic Community, the Kroc IPJ later convened a focus group in February 2019 of 10 Hispanic individuals from the city's Crown Heights Neighborhood.



This report provides an overview of the perspectives shared by community members at these events.

### Community Consultation Reveals Challenges and Opportunities

On November 14, 2018, the BTP Oceanside Cohort convened a group of residents to discuss the state of police-community relations in Oceanside. The event was held at the Veterans Association of North County, a location central to Oceanside. Approximately 50 individuals attended, 23 of whom completed a survey designed to assess the police-community relationship. While individuals were not asked to self-identify their ethnicity or race, based on superficial observation, the majority of attendees were white, followed by Hispanics/Latinos, African Americans, and Samoans.

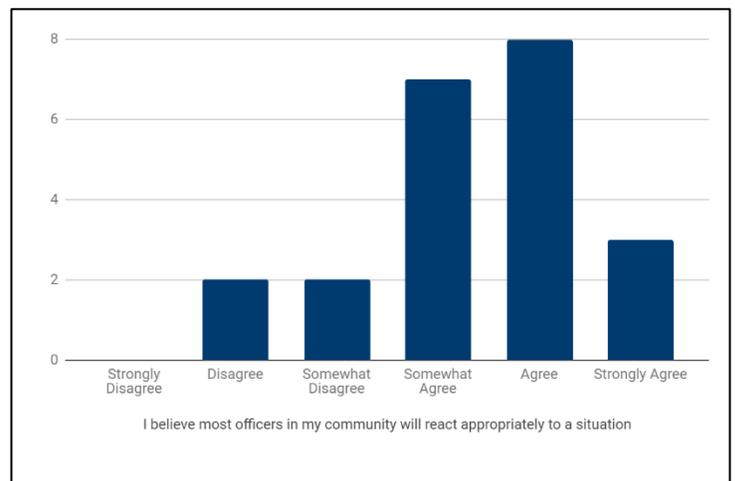
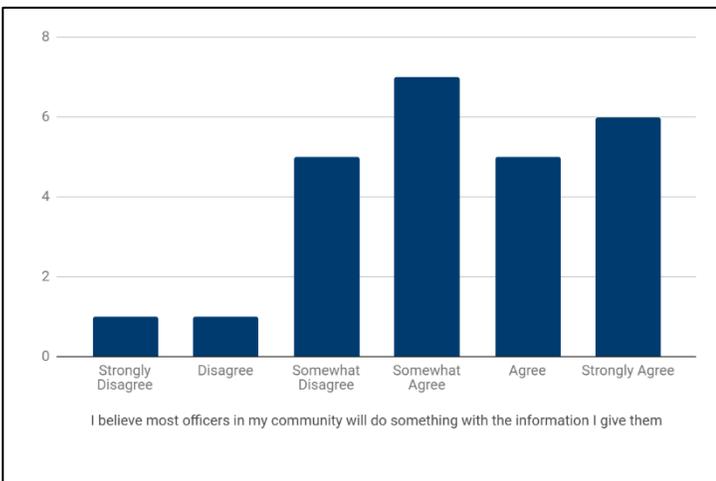
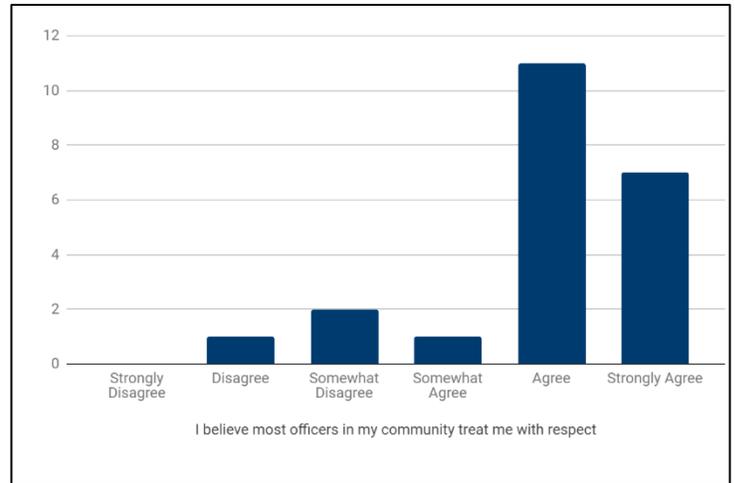
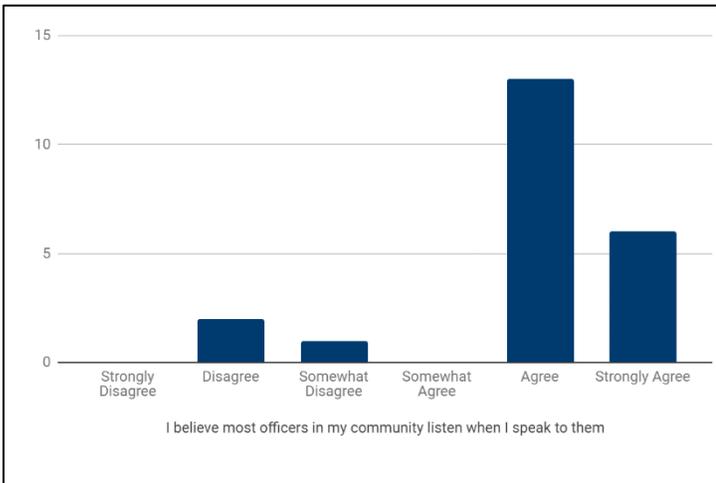
Religious leaders who were part of the BTP Oceanside Cohort facilitated dialogues with approximately eight people per table, asking questions related to each individual's experience OPD, their motivations for attending the event, and perceived opportunities for improvement. The Kroc IPJ and consultation note-takers would not attribute comments to participants so that they could speak candidly. After the facilitated table discussions, a member of each table shared a summary version of their conversation with the full group.

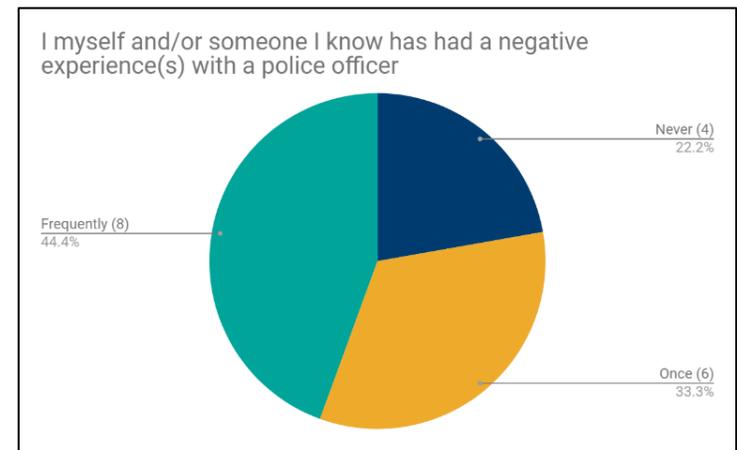
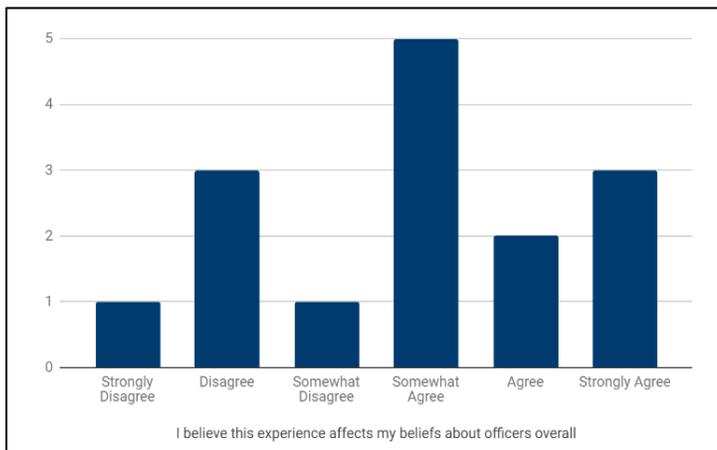
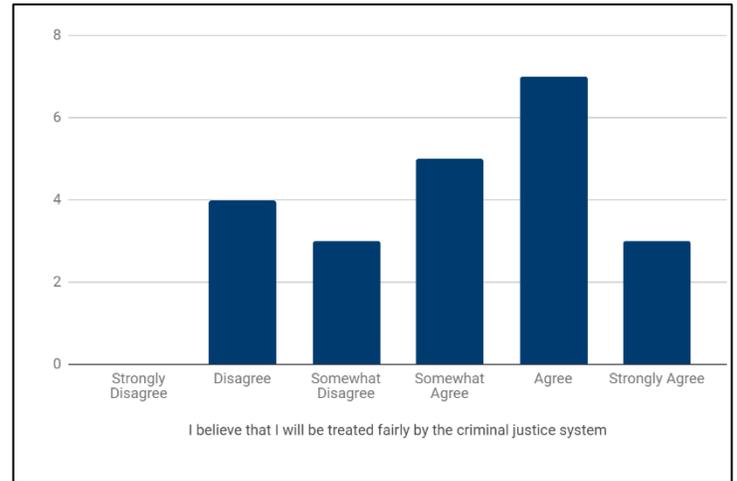
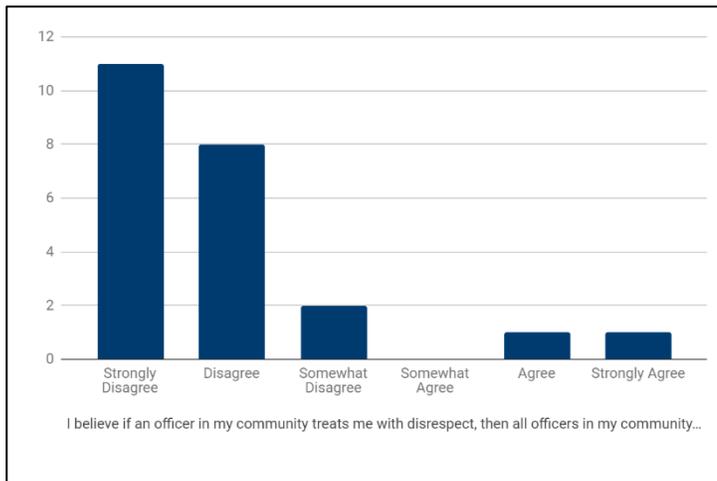
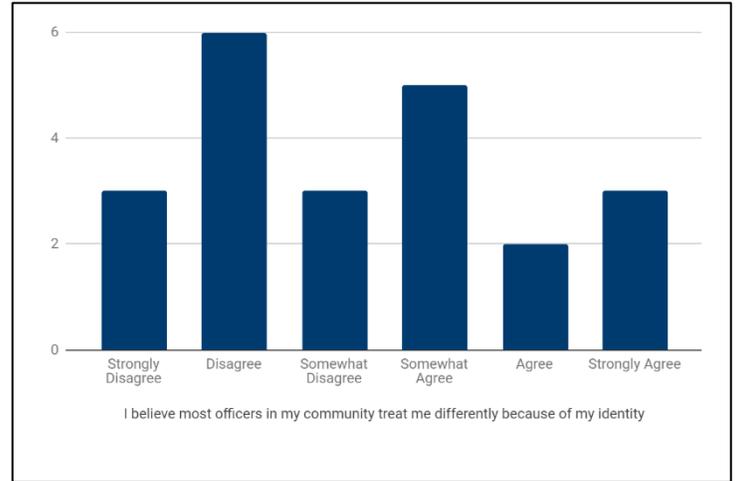
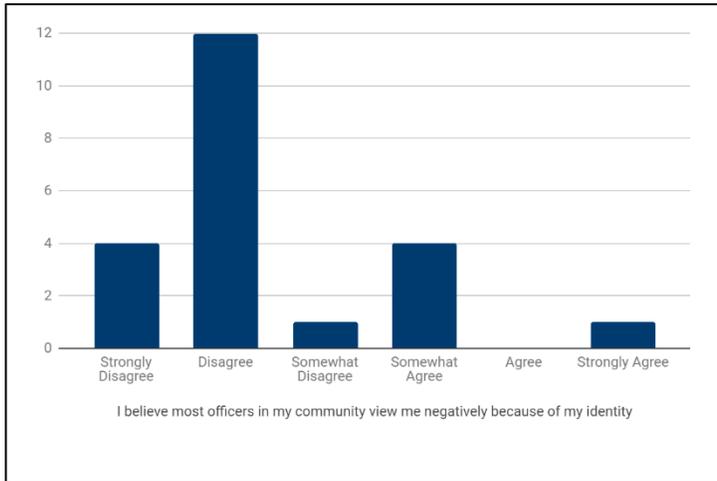
#### *Community Consultation Attendee Survey Data*

Based on an analysis of the survey responses provided by 23 attendees, key takeaways include:



- A majority of the community members have experienced positive treatment by OPD, although many also noted negative interactions experienced by themselves or that they witnessed.
- Attendees were not confident that OPD officers would respond adequately to their needs.
- Many community members identified a significant difference in the way that officers reacted to them based on their identity. A possible explanation for this difference could be that many white attendees acknowledged their own “white privilege” and recognized that other, non-white community members are treated differently because of their race.
- The majority of attendees did not believe one individual OPD officer’s negative actions should be generalized to other officers.
- Attendees were divided in their overall confidence in the criminal justice system.
- The vast majority of attendees have themselves or know someone who has had a negative experience with a police officer (although not necessarily OPD) and a majority of those having had a negative experience acknowledge that this one incident affects their beliefs about police officers in general.
- This finding highlights the importance of individual officers conducting themselves with courtesy, respect, and practicing procedural justice, because their actions reflect not only on themselves, but also on other police officers in Oceanside and beyond.





*Discussion Feedback*

In small groups and then as a whole, attendees were asked to respond to a number of questions related to their relationship with OPD. Responses are below listed in order of occurrence with the number of respondents offering similar sentiments expressed in parentheses.

**1. What motivated you to come to this event tonight?**

- To learn where the disconnect is between law enforcement and the community (7)
- To discuss solutions for the homeless problem in Oceanside (4)
- To speak for those who have concerns, but were afraid to come (2)
- To represent for the youth who are trying to stay out of gangs (2)
- Because I don't see cops as trying to improve the bond with the community (2)
- To help to change the marginalization of some in the community (1)
- Because I am worried about immigration issues. Some of my church members will not come out of the church if they see police down the street. (1)
- Asked to come by church leader (1)
- To improve communication (1)



**2. Have you had any direct experiences with the Oceanside Police Department? If so, what were those experiences like?**

- I have had a mixture of positive and negative experiences. (6)
- Only great experiences (3)
- I have worked with OPD to develop programs for at-risk youth that has strengthened bonds. (2)
- No communication (2)
- I had one very negative experience with an OPD officer who was incompetent in their investigation. The issue was later fixed and I received an apology. (2)
- I had a bad experience when I was stopped and the police officers fought with me. (1)
- There are differences between the experiences of the homeless and immigrant population and the experiences of the middle and upper class communities. (1)
- Positive experiences when I ask OPD about their day while on the boardwalk (1)
- I interact with OPD in a social setting and they have a lot of pride for their city and get defensive when people complain about drugs, gangs and homelessness. I feel the police need to be gentler with the homeless because they are people with feelings, souls, and lives and the officers sometimes don't treat them with respect. (1)
- I have had great interactions with OPD, but have also seen firsthand an OPD officer kick a homeless person on the ground when they were overdosing. (1)
- Abusing their power in my house (1)
- Authoritative, demeaning approach (1)
- Shootings happen and no police show up, but if there is a family party, 7-8 police cars. (1)
- Police abuse is a systematic problem - it is not really about the individuals, but more about the system itself. (1)
- I live in Rancho del Oro. I was stopped just walking down the street. The cop stopped to ask if I had ever been arrested before. She asked me what they would find if they looked at my license.



She proceeded to check out my profile. Meanwhile, there was a white guy walking on the other side of the street and he wasn't stopped.

**3. How would you describe your level of trust in the OPD?**

- Trust issues seem to run along racial lines (3)
- Some officers do not intend to know the community, they just do reports. This is not as compassionate. (2)
- I trust OPD, but feel others might not based on socio-economic status. (2)
- My church has two congregations – The white population trusts the police while the Hispanic congregation does not (1)
- Teenagers with gang activity in families tend to trust less (2)
- My perception is colored. I have a fear, not specific to Oceanside, but authority in general. Law enforcement can be beneficial or harmful. It is a big concern to me because of what I have seen in Chicago. I am fearful even though nothing is happening where I live. (1)
- I have personal trust and get respectful treatment, but my black friends who get pulled over just walking home experience unfair treatment. I wonder what it is like to have darker skin in Oceanside. (1)
- I have not personally had bad experiences, but have seen things happen. (1)
- I feel I am treated differently due to white privilege. (1)
- The level of trust is super low. (1)
- There is no way to avoid (neighborhood) retaliation for speaking up or calling the cops for help. There is not protection in place. (1)
- I have not seen any evidence to go against the perception of mistrust. (1)
- I do not trust police *anywhere*, but I want them to be there when I need them. (1)

**4. What are the positive things you see the Oceanside Police Department doing in your neighborhood?**

- They go to different neighbors and make themselves available. Rescue youth that are involved with gangs, mentor them, and provide services and opportunities. They help the housing department a lot to help relocate people. HOT teams are good. (6)
- Coffee with a cop (4)
- Neighborhood police team (3)
- PERT Team (2)
- Work collaboratively with community partners to solve issues when asked (1)
- Have had community officers stop by to meet new pastors and have discussions (1)
- Lots of individual police officers doing good things, like saying “Hi!” to a kid
- Youth and police playing basketball - the evolution is amazing! At first police were bystanders; now they are playing together. Awesome to watch! Great way to engage with community. (1)

**5. Are there things you would like to see the Oceanside Police Department do differently in your neighborhood? If so, do you have any ideas on how we can help to make these things happen?**

- More involvement with community (4)
- Mental illness sensitivity trainings (3)
- We need meetings where police know who gang members are. There needs to be communication to have a good chance to reduce crime. (2)
- Main St. Oceanside is a collection of organizations. Police should send a representative to this to hear the issues that the local business owners have. (1)
- Need better sports leagues to keep kids out of trouble (1)



**6. What would you like to see next from the Building Trust Partnership in Oceanside?**

- More support in the community to become involved (2)
- More community activities that include our local law enforcement (2)
- More open conversations (1)
- I would love to see a discussion forum around the steps OPD are taking, if any, to prevent excessive use of force, especially that driven by racial bias. (1)
- OPD demonstrating a desire to earn and build trust in the community with communication, trust and transparency (1)
- More grassroots movements to help the community flourish (1)

**Focus Group Participants Perceive Anti-Latino Bias**

On Thursday, February 21, the Kroc IPJ's Building Trust Partnership, in collaboration with an Oceanside community leader, hosted a focus group with 10 residents of Oceanside's Crown Heights neighborhood at Oceanside Sanctuary Church. These individuals agreed to speak about their experiences with and perceptions of OPD. The focus group was conducted in Spanish, and was recorded for 34 minutes before the individuals decided they would feel more comfortable speaking freely if they were not being recorded.

Half of the participants had little to share about OPD, either positive or negative. The other half of participants expressed feeling that the criminal justice system was working against them and spoke openly about negative experiences they had had with OPD. Some examples include:

- Being treated disrespectfully;
- Being harassed by officers;
- Having officers make negative statements towards them – e.g. “[I] couldn’t believe a Mexican like [you] could have a truck like that”;
- Being accused of gang membership and being profiled as gang members and “cholos” for living in neighborhoods with high levels of gang activity;
- Having trumped up charges added when they were booked;
- Feeling discriminated against for not speaking English;
- Being robbed by the police;
- Being threatened with immigration enforcement and removal.

Participants noted their perception that different treatment at the hands of law enforcement in Oceanside is attributable to race.

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