

Kent PD Community Focus Group Overview

Background

A total of 13 focus groups were held between March – July 2016. Focus groups were subsections of our community and included over 100 people. The participants were asked 8 questions which provided over 900 pages of transcripts for qualitative analysis. Based on these focus group results, the vast majority of our community is supportive of our department. Each group recognized the greatest constraint put on our department is the lack of funding, staffing, and resources.

Themes and Suggestions

The focus groups were successful at helping the department identify several prominent themes along with suggestions for goals, suggestions, and input on how to work on these themes. Themes are listed below along with related suggestions and are listed in relation to the repeated frequency of the topic being discussed by multiple focus groups. These themes are included because they were mentioned in at least eight of the 13 focus groups.

Community outreach and relationship building – This was overwhelmingly the most common mentioned theme throughout all focus groups. Our employees do a lot to build relationships but we are missing a lot of our population:

- Over communicate what we do and how we do it.
- Personify our staff – meet and greets, highlight officer of the month in community.
- Add community engagement as rating on employee evaluations.
- Attend school events such as field days, curriculum nights, back to school events.
- More patrol presence at middle and high school events.
- More engagement of students by SROs.

Police presence and visibility – The public's feeling/perception of safety is linked to police presence.

- Majority of our community may interact with the Kent Police Department one time. This one time interaction sets the tone for their perception of our department, services, and staffing.
- Encourage officers to get out of their cars; walk through properties.
- Increase bike patrols in all sectors.
- Implementation of foot patrols.

Communication and connection – It was said repeatedly that communication improves perception of our department. While many acknowledged communication occurs, the community wants more of it.

- Follow up communication about investigations, calls for service, and outcomes of projects and programs.
- Contact apartment managers in complexes when responding to calls.
- Utilize property managers for information on crime within the apartment complexes. Send them crime reports – two way communication.

Community diversity – Perception that the department’s Command Staff seem to understand the importance of building relationships with our diverse community groups but message is lost with patrol/line staff:

- Difficult to get to know neighbors - there is not the “close-knit” community feeling.
- Officers should attend cultural/local events – not just command staff level attendance. Take advantage of opportunities to learn about other cultures and participate.
- Provide mechanism to connect new officers with the community.
- Implement community relations training.

Kent Police Department diversity – Priority should be placed on recruiting more diverse populations so staff better reflect Kent community:

- Adjust hiring process.
- Recruit diverse populations.

Change the narrative – Strategic communications to influence the messaging about our department and city.

- Utilize more social media.
- Communicate with citizens, messaging/narrative, communication with each other, respectful interactions, better platforms for messaging.
- Identify outside of the box target audiences and locations (churches/temples, events).
- Implement and broadcast more traffic safety enforcement/issues.

Public safety concerns – The majority of public safety issues expressed by community:

- Traffic safety: pedestrians/ jaywalking, speeding, red light running
- Staffing
- Property crime
- Quality of life: blight buildings, homeless, graffiti.
- Hold property owners more accountable for lack of safety and issues on their property.
- Enhance technology for crime statistics/map sent out to public.

Community safety – People want to feel safe but often don’t. There are certain places in Kent perceived as not safe.

- Many are not aware of ongoing work the department does in those areas.
- Key words used to describe community safety include lighting, homeless, drug activity, gun violence.
- Provide flow chart/process information for how cases are handled from patrol to detectives.
- Provide strategic and ongoing communication about department programs.

Criminal justice issues – Concerns with 911 not assisting callers with providing officer response when the public wants it –reliance on online reporting, non-emergency number.

- Need for more resources and mental health assistance to include drug addiction services in-house at the Kent jail.
- Work with Valley Comm to address community 911 issues and concerns.

Community programs – Those who participate in Kent PD programs get the messages we are sending although many segments of Kent are not participating:

- Offer advanced crime prevention classes/programs, ie. Block Watch 102
- Explore using vacant buildings around city for department use.
- More programs at the jail for inmates (addiction, mental health, job training, etc.).