



WAUSAU POLICING TASK FORCE STUDY

Phase Three: Focus Group and Interview Report

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OVERVIEW

A. Introduction

In 2021, the City of Wausau commissioned the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) to conduct a community-wide information-gathering process of resident attitudes and perception towards the Wausau Police Department and policing in Wausau generally. This involved a three-phase process, including:

Phase One: A series of listening and feedback sessions via in-person and online sessions as well as an online feedback mechanism to allow any resident the opportunity to share feelings, concerns, and support for policing in Wausau. The feedback helped to inform the design of the Phase Two survey.

Phase Two: A survey of people who live and work in Wausau designed to systematically assess Wausau residents' (a) perceptions of the Wausau Police Department; (b) perceptions of specific police officer behaviors; (c) attitudes toward safety, officer recruitment, and other community-related policing issues; (d) sources of information about policing; and (e) specific experiences with the police.

Phase Three: A series of follow up focus groups with select demographic segments of the Wausau population, including employees of the Wausau Police Department. ***This report focuses on the process and findings for Phase Three.***

B. Phase Three Objectives

The objectives of Phase Three of the Wausau Policing Study include:

1. Solicit the perspectives of Wausau residents belonging to several demographic categories to help interpret and expand on findings from the survey of Wausau residents (Phase Two). These individuals represent groups who were more likely to express negative attitudes towards Wausau police than average residents, including:
 - residents with a history of mental health issues;
 - younger residents (aged 16-30);
 - residents who had been stopped, pulled over, or arrested by the Wausau police in the past twelve months;
 - residents who identify as non-heterosexual;
 - people of color (Black, Hispanic/LatinX, Hmong, Native American)
2. Solicit recommendations from individuals from these demographic categories for ways Wausau law enforcement can be improved.
3. Solicit the perspectives of law enforcement officers in both supervisory and staff positions to understand their concerns and capture any recommendations they might have.

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

Throughout October 2021, WIPPS conducted a series of nine focus groups and six interviews of individuals involving a total of 41 participants. At the direction of the Wausau Policing Task Force, we sought to include Wausau residents and police representing multiple demographic categories.

A. Focus Groups Categories

1) Residents

- Non-white residents (especially those who self-identify Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American, and Hmong)
- Individuals between the ages of 16 and 30
- Residents with past or current mental health challenges
- Residents with a history of being stopped, pulled over, or arrested by Wausau police in the past 12-24 months
- Residents who identify as non-heterosexual (LGBTQ+)

2) Police Officers

- Supervisors
- Non-supervisors

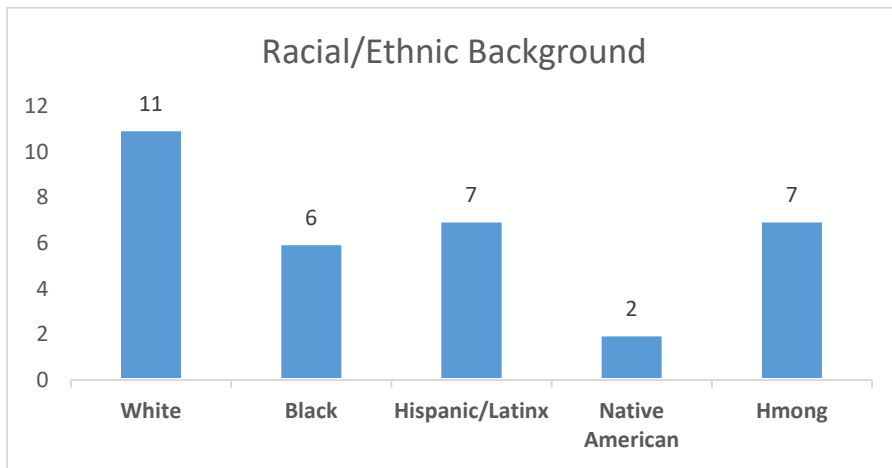
B. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The following demographic characteristics of **resident** participants in Phase Three were obtained using a brief survey at the conclusion of each focus group or interview:¹

- 8 individuals were aged 30 or under.
- 5 individuals (15%) self-reported as non-heterosexual, with 23 (70%) reporting as heterosexual (5 did not report their sexual preference).
- 11 (33%) self-identified as male; 15 (45%) as female; and 2 as non-binary (6%) (5 did not identify their gender).
- 17 (52%) reported being renters or living with others; 11 (35%) reported being homeowners (5 did not report their housing status).
- In terms of race and ethnicity, out of 33 resident participants, people identified as follows: 11 White, 7 Hmong, 7 Hispanic/LatinX, 6 Black, 2 Native American. See Figure 1 below.

¹ Not all resident participants chose to complete the survey.

Figure 1. Racial Ethnic Background of Resident Participants



- Although we did not specifically ask people about their mental health history or prior arrest record, we sought out individuals with a history of arrests, substance addiction, and mental health challenges. At least ten participants mentioned having a history of mental health challenges and/or substance misuse. Most participants reported having direct interactions with the Wausau Police.
- In addition, we conducted two focus groups with Wausau Police Department personnel, one consisting of non-supervisors (3 participants) and one of supervisors (5 participants). All police officers or detectives were male.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

This report relies on focus groups and interviews to capture the voices of a select group of Wausau residents and police officers. Individuals were made aware of the focus groups via multiple organizations and individuals including Marathon County Literacy Council, Marathon County Drug Recovery Court, Adult Drug Court, ATTIC, Marathon County AODA Partnership Council, The Women’s Community, Wausau School District, and select individuals from the Hmong, Hispanic/LatinX and Black communities in Wausau, among others. The Wausau Police Department leadership put the word out to officers and detectives and encouraged participation in the police-only focus groups. Participating officers self-selected.

As a methodology, focus group and interviews are *not* intended to yield results or insights that are generalizable to a larger population (such as residents of Wausau or the Wausau Police Department as a whole). Rather, focus groups are used to better understand the reasons underlying individuals’ perspectives or a range of perspectives on a given topic, and to provide insights about how a situation is perceived and experienced by a small subset of people. Our goal in this report is to accurately represent the range of views expressed *only* by the residents and police officers who participated in the focus groups or interviews.

This report does *not* cite the exact frequency or quantity with which comments or opinions are expressed. The use of specific numeric references in a focus group report can sometimes lead readers to inadvertently think about responses in terms of percentages (X percent of residents think this; Y percent think that), which can then lead to false generalizations. Those kinds of specific characterizations require a methodology where a larger number of individuals are sampled, such as a survey.

We use terminology to convey the general pervasiveness of a theme such as “many” or “most”; “some” or “several”; or “a few.” How these characterizations are applied is largely at the discretion of the analyst/observer, as they can depend on the context of the question and response; whether comments or themes related to a question come up at other points in the discussion; and other cues such as body language of participants (e.g., head nodding). To minimize some of the inherent subjectivity and to introduce a level of inter-rater reliability, the focus groups transcripts were read and reviewed by at least four different analysts. These analysts categorized themes independently of each other before agreeing on the terminology used in the findings as well as themes that appear in this report. This multi-level review serves as a “check” on the balance, completeness, and accuracy of the summary findings.

For readability, convenience, and to improve the flow of the narrative, throughout the report we sometimes use terminology such as “Residents said...,” “Officers said...,” or “Participants reported...,” or we may say directly, “Focus group participants said....” These are all shorthand references to the specific residents and police officers who participated in the focus groups or

interviews and should not be interpreted as reflective of, or generalized to, all Wausau residents or to all law enforcement officials from the Wausau Police Department.

Finally, we offer a few notes on the quoted material presented in the findings. For ease of readability, in some cases, participants' quotes have been edited to remove filler words such as "like," "um," "yeah," "so," etc. We also removed some repetitive phrases, particularly when participants were struggling to decide how to say something, and which created unintentional repetition or incomplete thoughts. Moreover, names of individuals were expunged in order to protect the anonymity of participants. Occasionally, we add a word in brackets when something was obviously and unintentionally omitted by the speaker or when a quote is used in which the participant referenced something said previously but which was not directly verbalized in the excerpted segment.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Focus Group Findings include thematic findings from both Wausau residents and police officers in response to the focus group questions shown in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. Residents were selected based on identification with one or more demographic characteristics of interest to the Task Force (as described in the Focus Group Demographics section on pages 2-3). Participating police officers consisted of supervisors and non-supervisors who were informed about the opportunity by Wausau Police Department leaders and volunteered to share their perspectives.

An Important Note to Readers

Findings are based on participant perceptions

The findings herein are based on the perceptions of focus group participants and cannot be assumed to reflect objective truth about current Wausau Police Department practices and officer behavior. For example, although researchers asked residents to share experiences *only* about the Wausau Police, a few residents clearly conflated past experiences with law enforcement in multiple geographies and jurisdictions. Similarly, we asked residents to share experiences that happened recently (within the last 12-24 months), but some residents shared stories that obviously occurred years ago. Despite these shortcomings, we urge readers not to dismiss resident comments. Whether applicable or not to current practices of the Wausau Police Department—and whether fair or unfair to the current state of policing—resident comments reveal insights on how some of the more marginalized individuals in Wausau feel about local law enforcement.

Findings are from sub-groups who have more negative feelings towards police

We cannot overemphasize that the primary purpose of this report is to provide a window into the mindset of a small group of individuals from specific groups identified in the Phase Two survey who tend to have more negative views towards the Wausau Police than average residents, including residents who have been recently arrested; residents who have had mental health challenges; residents aged 30 or under; residents who identify as non-heterosexual; and residents who identify as non-white. Those who participated in these focus groups are largely self-selecting and may have a particular predisposition towards the police. Therefore, we urge readers not to assume that the focus group findings are reflective of the vast majority of Wausau residents. Instead, we encourage readers to think of this report as a window into the minds of a small group of residents who tend to have more negative views about policing generally.

Findings are NOT generalizable to the broader population

There is a temptation to assume that findings from focus groups can be generalized to broader subsets of the resident population. These findings cannot and should not be generalized in this way. Focus groups participants do not constitute a random sample and therefore cannot be considered representative of any group or sub-group of the city of Wausau. When we say things like, “Residents believe ...” or “Officers believe ...” we are referring only to those who participated in the focus groups.

Finding 1

National news and social media affect attitudes.

Depictions of policing in the media, especially news coverage of policing-related stories at the national level and across social media, were cited by many focus group participants to be an influence on Wausau residents' attitudes towards local law enforcement. Residents and police officers both believe that national news and social media typically skew opinions towards the negative. Neither police nor residents specifically mentioned local media as being influential in shaping residents' viewpoints about the police.

Police officers, more than the residents, believe the national media is frequently misleading or misinforming when it comes to the portrayal of law enforcement, which is then magnified on social media. Additionally, a few officers remarked that current trends in information-sharing make it even more difficult for many residents to differentiate between editorial content (i.e., opinion) and actual facts. Officers expressed concern that anti-police sentiment is currently a social media "fad" that is particularly influential among younger residents.

Finding 2

Culture and history influence perceptions.

Participants said that some negative attitudes towards the police are the result of a complex set of factors that work to reinforce one other, including culture and history, combined with other influences such as personal experiences and family stories, all of which can contribute to reinforcing pre-existing attitudes towards law enforcement. As one younger Wausau resident explained, "cultural history is distinct from other forces but the two are reinforcing." How specific sub-cultures and family stories are shared and passed on about law enforcement has a significant impact on whether and to what extent residents trust the police.

Police officers are aware of and frustrated by this moment in history during which negative attention and attitudes towards policing is at its highest point since the 1960s. They report experiencing fallout from these negative attitudes when interacting with some residents. For example, some residents are calling into question their ethics, standards, and objectivity—or worse—claiming (without evidence) that police are racist. They believe that the George Floyd incident and ongoing national media attention has helped launch a movement that, at its core, has an anti-police bias.

Finding 3

Police *and* resident behavior matter.

Almost all resident focus group participants cited examples of clear and specific behaviors by Wausau police officers they had either experienced or directly witnessed that had shaped their current attitudes. About half of the participants shared stories of a positive encounter they experienced or witnessed with the Wausau police. This is particularly noteworthy given that focus group participants self-selected, in part, because they represented one of several demographic categories that reported feeling more negatively toward police on average than other Wausau residents. In other words, despite representing groups with more negative feelings about police, many participants articulated approbation and approval for Wausau police officers with whom they'd had contact.

However, most participants also mentioned negative encounters they had experienced or witnessed involving police officers. Expressions of frustration with police behavior were a common motif in these stories, underlying participants' belief that the actions of police officers are a primary driver of their negative attitudes towards law enforcement. Participants' descriptions of their encounters with local police raised multiple common themes outlined below.²

Officers who participated in the focus groups, meanwhile, had a very clear message about resident-police encounters: outcomes are almost always dependent on resident behavior. As one officer put it, "We react to [residents] in most cases.... If they are respectful they will get respect." In other words, in most cases, police are merely reacting to behavior initiated by residents.

1) Responsibility for positive outcomes. Multiple participants noted the importance of the first few moments of contact between police and residents as pivotal to setting a tone for the rest of the encounter as well as for future encounters. Resident participants acknowledged that they may have some preconceived biases (both positive and negative) about the police generally, but that officers' initial behavior and attitudes play a major role in how residents will feel and act during encounters. Although multiple residents articulated a belief that law enforcement officers bear primary responsibility for ensuring that encounters with residents are positive, most participants recognized that *both* officers and residents share responsibility for how encounters play out, whether positive or negative. Some participants recognized that difficult situations often require officers to make tough choices and engage in behavior that leave some residents unsatisfied. Overall, participants accepted this tension, while still maintaining that there is room for improvement.

Police participants said that officers typically approach encounters with an open mind and a willingness to interact with residents in a peaceful and productive manner. Several officers noted, however, that in the face of resident rudeness, disobedience, or disruption, law

² It should be noted that a few residents did not distinguish between interactions with Wausau police versus police in other jurisdictions.

enforcement officers will (justifiably) respond with a more “negative” demeanor. The implication is that residents are primarily responsible for how police-resident encounters play out. Officers also expressed a belief, based on their experience, that pre-existing resident biases sometimes taint police-resident interactions even before they begin.

- 2) Perceptions of power and authority.** Many resident participants remarked upon their acute awareness of the power and authority that law enforcement officers wield, citing this difference in power between police and residents as having the potential to cause fear and mistrust, as well as influence how residents feel and act during encounters with law enforcement. While no resident expressed a fundamental rejection of the legitimacy of this power differential, many articulated an expectation and hope that law enforcement officers will use their power and authority with sensitivity. At times, residents said, they do not.

Several officers participating in the focus groups expressed awareness of the power differential between themselves and Wausau residents. They believe that this power is necessary for them to do their jobs and to ensure public safety. And while police officers believe they use power and authority responsibly, they nonetheless recognize that this differential is an intrinsic cause of some residents’ concerns about law enforcement. Despite this, as trained professionals who work for a department that emphasizes accountability, officers believe residents can have confidence in their motives and actions.

- 3) Aggressive behavior and escalation.** A number of resident participants expressed concern about how police approach encounters and cited numerous examples of what they deemed unnecessarily aggressive behavior. Residents say such behavior causes them to feel fear and hostility towards the police and sometimes escalates into bigger problems during encounters. They also believe that unnecessarily aggressive police behavior contributes to long term negative attitudes towards law enforcement.

Police participants believe that they approach stops, pullovers, arrests, and other situations with a professional attitude and demeanor, and that their actions are reflective of both situational demands as well as the actions of residents themselves. They also acknowledge that they are human and occasionally make mistakes. For example, they are sometimes tired, frustrated, or even upset by the situations or interactions they face. But these circumstances are few and far between. As one officer put it, “We know that when the pressure's on we gotta act like ... we're not doing anything but filling out an application or putting gas in our car.”

Police also say that the primary driver of whether or not a police-resident encounter escalates depends on the residents themselves. Police described themselves much like a mirror: reflecting what residents bring to the table. In other words, resident attitudes and behavior generally determine how encounters play out, whether positive or negative.

- 4) Importance of dignity, kindness, empathy, and respect.** A number of participants expressed their expectation and hope that encounters between police and residents would

enable residents to feel that their innate dignity as human beings is being respected, regardless of the circumstances that brought them into contact with police. They also suggest that if officers showed appropriate kindness and empathy, particularly to people who are experiencing mental health challenges, resident-police encounters would be significantly improved. Police behavior that displays indifference to the concerns of residents or that fails to demonstrate appropriate concern and care was cited by numerous participants as a source of disappointment and frustration toward law enforcement.

A majority of participants recommended that Wausau Police Department could meaningfully improve resident attitudes towards the police by helping to teach and motivate police officers to remain cognizant and respectful of the humanity of all with whom they interact. This includes a range of behavior from arriving on scene with a calm and friendly demeanor to being more carefully attuned to what people are saying and how they are saying it to simply treating people with basic dignity and respect.

Police officers pointed out that negative feelings about the police are mostly reflected in the comments of a few self-selecting individuals who do not represent the vast majority of Wausau residents. They also believe that residents who express such feelings mostly come into situations with pre-existing attitudes that are inherently negative towards the police. However, officers acknowledge that police intervention or actions may reinforce those feelings.

5) Treating people equitably. Most focus group participants cited instances of law enforcement behavior that they believe exhibited favoritism towards, or bias against, certain individuals or groups of people. They indicated that having different standards of treatment, no matter the basis, fundamentally erodes resident trust in law enforcement, and particularly among individuals and groups that have more negative views towards the police to begin with. A number of participants said that only a few Wausau officers demonstrate such bias, and that the vast majority of Wausau police officers treat residents equitably. A couple of participants indicated that they had *not* seen or experienced any bias in police behavior and felt that the police were receiving unfair criticism.

Police participants expressed strong confidence that they can and do treat Wausau residents equitably, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and/or history of mental illness or drug use. In general, officers said that negative police-resident interactions are caused by negative resident attitudes and behavior rather than officer bias. For example, officers mentioned that some residents make unfair assumptions about how police officers think and feel and that they typically enter encounters with their own biases and preconceptions.

All of the officer participants said they value treating people fairly; however, a couple of officers admitted that dealing with people from different backgrounds and cultures can be challenging, particularly when resident values seem to be in conflict with their own personal values. However, officers also made very clear that they recognize the importance of treating all people equally regardless of background. They said that they are professionals who understand the importance of setting personal biases aside when on the job. In fact, they expressed frustration

that their motives are being questioned and were quick to point out that police are held to a higher standard than the residents they serve.

6) Effective listening and communication. Some resident participants believe that law enforcement officers' communication skills significantly affect how community members feel about police officers and how police-resident interactions play out. Participants cited the importance of police officers entering situations without preconceived ideas about what is going on, keeping an open mind, and taking the time to seek out the perspectives of individuals (and witnesses) present at the scene before making judgments. Residents shared some experiences where they felt officers fell short.

Police officers believe that listening and responding appropriately is a core element of their job. As discussed previously, they feel strongly that they approach all situations—whether routine stops or crisis events—without bias, responding only to information and facts on the ground. They also noted that circumstances sometimes demand actions or responses that can make people feel unhappy or uncomfortable and which they have an obligation to carry out to ensure safety and/or as a basic function of their job. As one officer put it, “[We]’re in the business of having to choose sides sometimes when it comes to a conflict and telling one side ‘You’re right’ and the other side, ‘You’re wrong,’ ... that leaves negative feelings. No matter how nicely you can try to explain it to somebody ... they’re not going to get what they want.”

Finding 4

Support for mental health crises.

Numerous resident participants shared experiencing or witnessing problematic encounters involving law enforcement and individuals with mental health and substance addiction issues. There was broad agreement among residents that police officers are not adequately trained or equipped to deal with mental health crises. This led to two distinct suggestions. First, some residents suggested that officers should receive training to better understand the states of individuals in various types of mental health crises and learn specific skills to help de-escalate such situations. However, a significant number of residents emphasized that officers are hired to address crime and public safety, not mental health issues. As a result, they said, intervening with people experiencing mental health challenges should be the primary domain of social service organizations and not the police. Many participants mentioned their approval of the CART program and advocated sending the CART to scenes involving individuals experiencing mental health crises. Several participants emphasized the importance of expanding the CART program to ensure it is available at all times.

Numerous officers echoed the concerns of residents and acknowledged having to routinely intervene in situations involving mental health and substance abuse challenges that they are not equipped to handle effectively. Officers generally agreed that they do not have the training, expertise, or resources to best meet the needs of individuals in these circumstances. As a result, they, too, argued for more social services participation and support. Most officers expressed

approbation for the CART program and believe it could and should be expanded. Most officers also indicated they believe resource shortfalls must be addressed to provide Wausau residents with the mental health support they need; however, some officers expressed concern that reallocating resources might come at the cost of losing officers from regular patrol duties, which they strongly oppose.

Finding 5

Fear and socio-cultural barriers leave some residents reluctant to call police for help.

Participants believe that the primary function of law enforcement is to preserve and protect the safety of Wausau residents. However, some participants mentioned a reluctance to call the police when they need assistance. Several cited fear and other barriers (cultural, economic, and social) which make them feel as though they do not trust the police and cannot rely on them when help is needed. Overall, this suggests that, for a small subset of residents at least, the foundational compact between residents and law enforcement can be improved.

Finding 6

The challenge of policing and officer wellbeing.

A majority of resident focus group participants acknowledged that law enforcement work is extremely challenging. Police are in the unenviable position of dealing with difficult situations and individuals which sometimes demand actions likely to upset people and create unavoidable tension between police and residents. As a result, some residents expressed concerns about the mental stress placed on officers and the potential for spillover into police behavior and attitudes. Residents recognized the need for more community support for policing, as well as departmental support for individual officers such as mental health screening and resources.

Police participants also recognized the challenging nature of their job and the stress it places on officers, particularly in a climate where some media outlets and residents are increasingly critical of the police. Given these concerns, officers expressed hope that residents can be patient and understanding. However, there is an apparent divide between police non-supervisor and supervisor participants regarding the effectiveness of department wellness programs. Most supervisors expressed confidence that the mental health resources available to law enforcement employees were helpful and working, particularly in comparison to the past. Non-supervisors, in contrast, cited multiple concerns with current resources, including difficulty in accessing timely help; cost of services; inconvenience and shortcomings of EAP; lack of experience among counselors in dealing with officers; and innate resistance among officers to avail themselves of wellness resources.

Finding 7

Resident ideas for improving police-community relations.

Residents who participated in the focus groups were not shy about sharing suggestions for improving both individual police officers' behavior as well as the culture of law enforcement generally in the Wausau community. These suggestions are clustered into several themes shared below. Recommendations were quite diverse and at times, non-specific and contradictory. With a few exceptions, participants seemed unaware of ongoing efforts by the Wausau Police Department to address some of the very concerns that they are most passionate about. Whether their concerns and suggestions are accurate or not, it is important to recognize that they are based on residents' lived experience combined with perceptions about potential areas for improvement. That said, it is also important to consider that the Wausau Police Department and its officers believe many residents—including those who participated in the focus groups—are largely unaware of the significant time, effort, training and resources that the Wausau Police Department have already put into addressing many of these concerns.

- 1) Language competence.** Given the presence in Wausau of several groups whose first language is not English, several participants noted the degree to which some competence in other languages (notably Spanish and Hmong) could ease tensions during encounters between some residents and law enforcement officers. According to these participants, either language competence or effective interpreters are vital to effective law enforcement.
- 2) Cultural competence.** A number of participants recommended that law enforcement officers receive training to improve their cultural competence—not merely in the ethnographic or racial sense, but also their cultural understanding of individuals with mental health challenges, victims of domestic violence, and young people, as well as those from a different ethnic or cultural background. Additionally, residents noted that greater understanding of the values and concerns of the Hmong and Hispanic communities in Wausau would help officers approach encounters in ways that avoid inadvertently arousing fear or confrontational behavior.
- 3) Anti-bias training.** Numerous resident participants strongly recommended that Wausau law enforcement officers receive training to make them aware of and overcome the intrinsic bias common in most human beings, and to improve officers' abilities to avoid discriminating against individuals from marginalized or underrepresented demographics. Police officers, on the other hand, strongly believe that they are appropriately trained, educated and prepared to handle most individuals they encounter.³
- 4) Prioritize a diverse police force.** Multiple participants mentioned the importance of a diverse police force as key to improving residents' attitudes towards law enforcement. However, a few participants acknowledged that resource shortfalls can make the process of attracting,

³ One exception is dealing with people with mental health or substance addiction issues, which is addressed in Finding 4.

hiring and retaining diverse officers a challenge. A few residents also seemed to be aware that the Wausau Police Department has been actively engaged in hiring diverse candidates.⁴

5) Strengthen police-community engagement. Many participants expressed the belief that resident attitudes towards police can be improved by ensuring the public has frequent, non-institutionalized, and non-confrontational interactions with law enforcement. Residents voiced specific approval for existing initiatives such as the Citizen’s Academy, the annual police cookout, and other proactive efforts to connect law enforcement more deeply with the community. In general, residents are supportive of encouraging and strengthening police-community interactions that are healthy, innovative and designed to help marginalized residents feel that the police are non-threatening and trustworthy. They acknowledge that building trusting relationships takes time, and a few recognized that the community has an equally important role to play in achieving this goal.

Finding 8

Are police officers accountable?

Several participants observed that most police officers in Wausau demonstrate appropriate behavior the vast majority of the time. On the flipside, they believe there are a small number of officers who consistently engage in inappropriate behavior. They recommend strengthening processes for holding such individual police officers more accountable. But even more important, some focus group participants believe that lasting change requires a culture of, and pathways for, “good” officers to be able and willing to call out colleagues who are engaged in inappropriate behaviors.

Several officers who participated in focus groups mentioned they had seen inappropriate behavior displayed by a Wausau police officer. However, there was strong consensus among officers that the Wausau Police Department has a robust system in place to call out such behavior and, when necessary, to discipline and correct it. According to one officer, you “probably couldn’t throw a rock without hitting an officer who’s been disciplined,” which is a sign of the Department’s commitment to accountability as well as its effectiveness. In addition, police participants are confident that beyond formal departmental accountability, individual officers feel empowered and incentivized to call out poor behavior thanks to an internal culture of accountability. As one officer put it, “I have absolutely no problem and no hesitation calling out or bringing forward a concern about an officer or coworker that I feel is doing things based on ... some type of discriminatory feelings or anything like that.”

⁴ Police participants were not directly asked about Department hiring practices. However, the Wausau Chief of Police has stated that the WPD has prioritized hiring diverse candidates.

Finding 9

Address bias and injustice in the community.

A number of resident participants observed that some negative community perceptions about the police stem from issues of prejudice and discrimination in the greater Wausau community that spill over into issues and circumstances involving law enforcement. Residents also expressed a conviction that any meaningful attempt to improve community interactions with law enforcement must be accompanied by attention to addressing unequal opportunities, unmet social needs, and systemic discrimination in the broader community. Some focus group participants acknowledged that this is a shared community problem and not the fault of police.

Officer participants believe that much of the problems related to negative perceptions of and attitudes towards the police stem from broader social issues beyond their control. Negative incidents involving police in larger metropolitan areas, combined with anti-police social movements—amplified by national media and social media—paint the police in a negative light. The problem, according to officers, is not the attitudes and behavior of the Wausau Police Department but stems from broader societal and cultural issues which, in turn, shape resident attitudes.

APPENDIX A: RESIDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. We just completed a survey of the Wausau population to ask them about their experiences with and attitudes towards Wausau law enforcement. We found a few interesting results. One thing we found was that [people under 30; people who identify as LGBTQ+; People of Color; people with past or present mental health issues; people who have been stopped or arrested by the Wausau Police Department] had more negative attitudes towards Wausau police than the average Wausau resident. Why do you think we may have seen that result? What do you think are the reasons for those groups to have a more negative attitude toward law enforcement?
2. Do you have a story of an interaction with a Wausau police officer you'd like to share? Is there anything you think the Wausau police officer(s) could have done differently to make that a more satisfactory experience for you?
3. Generally, did you feel personally safe during your interaction(s) with the police? Why or why not?
4. Wausau Police have asked us to get recommendations from you. What would you recommend that the Wausau Police do to make sure people feel safe when they're interacting with police officers?
5. Who is responsible for making sure that interactions between police and residents go well? How might that look? Can you give an example?
6. What kind of behavior makes you distrust the Wausau police? What sort of police behavior would make you trust them?
7. What do police need to know or do better when interacting with [people with mental health issues/people with a history of addiction/people of color/LGBTQ+ folks/etc].
 - a. What about people who are considered homeless?
 - b. What specific recommendation do you have for making sure police officers are better prepared to interact with folks from these populations?
8. Some people who live or work in Wausau feel that the level of safety in their community has decreased over the past year, and others feel that it has increased. Do you feel that the level of safety in your community has decreased or increased (or stayed the same)? What do you need to feel MORE safe in your community? Is there anything the Wausau Police can do to help you feel more safe? Please explain.
9. Do you have any other recommendations you'd like us to share with the Wausau Police Department?

APPENDIX B: POLICE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. We just completed a survey of the Wausau population to ask them about their experiences with and attitudes towards Wausau law enforcement. One finding was that [people under 30; people who identify as LGBTQ+; people of color; people with past or present mental health issues; people who have been stopped or arrested by the Wausau Police Department] had noticeably more negative attitudes towards Wausau police than the average Wausau resident. What do you think are some reasons why these groups have a more negative attitude toward law enforcement?
2. We also learned from the survey that a majority of residents believe that the police are doing a very good job. However, a few residents have reported repeated encounters where specific officers who were not empathetic, didn't listen, discriminated against certain people, and did not treat people with dignity and respect generally. Do you believe there is a culture of "accountability" in the WPD to address such behavior? What happens if officers repeatedly engage in such behavior?
3. Many residents in the survey and in discussions with us have agreed that policing is a difficult and stressful job and they are concerned about officers mental wellbeing. What resources within the department and in the community are available to provide police with appropriate support for the stress of their jobs? Are those resources sufficient and useful?
 - a. If not, what else should be available to officers?
4. Many residents expressed support for the co-response efforts in Wausau (the CART program). Is that model effective from your perspective? Does the program need to be expanded? Or omitted? Or is it just right?
 - a. Are there other co-responder programs the WPD should be considering?
5. What sort of behaviors or situational factors make you less trustful with a member of the public you might be encountering? What behaviors and/or situational factors might make you feel personally unsafe?
6. What sort of police behavior do you think would make the public better trust law enforcement?
7. Who is responsible for making sure that interactions between police and residents go well?
 - a. What do Wausau Police need to do to make sure interactions with the public go well?
 - b. What does the public need to do to make sure interactions with police go well?
 - c. What recommendations would you make to ensure that these things happen?
8. Is there anything police officers need to know or do better when interacting with people with mental health issues/people with a history of addiction/people of color/LGBTQ+ folks/homeless/etc.

- a) Do you have any recommendations that would improve interactions with folks from these populations?
- 9. Some residents in Wausau feel that the level of safety in their community has decreased over the past year, and others feel that it has increased. Why do you think the public may feel one way or the other? What do you think might be responsible for that increase/decrease?
- 10. Think about the current weaknesses and strengths of the Wausau Police Department. Do you have any thoughts or recommendations you'd like us to share with the Wausau Policing Task Force to address the weaknesses and/or take advantage of strengths?

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE QUOTES FROM FINDINGS

Finding 1 National news and social media affect attitudes.

Residents

When I was 16 and just got my driver's license. It was the time when some BLM stuff was happening—can't remember which event—but saw negative things about police, and once I was driving at night and I forgot to turn my headlights on and I got pulled over. And I was really scared because of what I saw on social media.

I believe that the younger generation has negative perspective and less respect for police because of what is seen around the world. The thing about the younger generation is that we are built off of social media and what we learn and see on social media.

It's very easy to oftentimes point fingers and to feel that they're treating you here in a manner that is either racist or biased or anything like that if you're listening to the news statewide or around the country, okay, and it's easy to say well I got this because I am either a color or I'm on the LBGT community thing.

Police

Media influence I think is big...especially for the people under 30. Social media is huge for them—that's where they find most of their information. I also would challenge that demographic with how much of the actual facts do they read versus browsing headlines and I think that might happen a lot more ... where we get our information from is a big deal because we don't always find every source to be as revealing of actual facts as they are opinions or skewing the facts.

The survey came out ... kind of as a response [to]—but also during just—a ridiculous time, especially on social networking.... I got tired of logging on every day and seeing just anti-police stuff everywhere and knowing that that isn't an accurate or full story.... People that think they know what they're talking about making comments. I think people that are a little bit more mature or a little older kind of look at it and tend to say alright, well, what's the whole story. But for younger people, kind of like [Participant X] said, they just look at the headlines—just look at the initial stuff and they don't really think much more about it. They think that that's just the truth and it's frustrating.... Well, I'm not blaming it all on media, but I think media is a huge thing because [I heard a] quote that “If you don't watch the media, you're uninformed ... if you do watch the media, you're misinformed.” So, ... I personally am very frustrated with even just how to get accurate information

[Y]ou also have the media side and kind of the culture upbringing I'm going to call it where things are controlled through Facebook or information is controlled through Instagram and the fad has kind of been, you know, the Dirty Harry type policing where you ... try to catch officers on recording or try to

spin things in a certain way and then post it on Facebook. And ... I hate blaming media for anything because I don't think it's one sole ... player. There's a lot of factors that go into it, but I'm also going to agree with [participant X] that I think that's a huge factor in why we might have that response on this survey.

I question all of it because part of that is our nature as law enforcement, when somebody gives us information, we don't just take it as face value. We have to realize that, okay, there's several sides to a story people give you what they want to they present something in a way that that supports their personal opinion which can kind of skew facts. So, it's frustrating even for me to try and get information. I can't imagine somebody that really—they don't have the frustration of trying to get the information—they just take it at face value and a lot of times they are again misinformed.

I don't want to blame everything on media, but it is a huge factor and I also think we have to look at the generation itself. And I read the responses and I guess that was my initial thought is that the generation itself was influenced by media and ... that I think is a huge factor.

[Name of Little Brother] told me that he hates the police today and to me it was like, wow, ... I've been hanging out with him for two years and it's always been great, we haven't had an issue. Where is this coming from? [His mother is], like, "Well, that's why I want you to talk to him because he sees what's on TV an automatically thinks that because he is black that he has to hate the police because what he's seeing on TV." That was huge ... for me: A 10-year-old who is seeing what's going on in the world, who is turning on the news, or going on Facebook actually doesn't have a Facebook account—but ... just what he's exposed to and then automatically goes to "I hate police."

Finding 2

Culture and history influence perceptions.

Residents

If you look back on the history and you see things that have gone on in that community. The relationship between the police and the type of community hasn't been positive. Especially the LGBT community, when it comes to feeling safe and being trans, the crime rate for that is high. I think it really comes to historical trauma, where like the history hasn't been good, so they are basing it off fight or flight. They base it off of experience and people with the same experiences as you.

I think we are all at the kind of point where we have an older sibling that we kind of branched off of whether their interactions with police works—that's how you would do a police officer.... You know, just culturally being raised in that kind of area where ... your older sibling was involved with police and had bad interactions. Those stories come to you and it stems from there. But then ... if they had good interactions with police, like, ... their older sibling was a police officer or something like that, then you tend to typically have a pretty good view or a positive view of police officers.

[W]e [in the Hmong community] don't want our issues to go out. We want to keep the closed house. We have this system where we will fix it within our walls, nobody needs to get involved. Nobody needs to know. We can fix this ourselves and that's how our grandparents [and] our parents have always conducted ... their lives in that way.... And I think that's why we have these issues with domestic disputes and stuff like that. Over the past several years where ... it kind of blows up and the community gets involved in some of these tragic incidents....

I would say in the Hispanic community, oftentimes, ... if we come from a country where there's a lot of corruption with the police and everything, we kind of like to think that this is not like [that here], too. But I think that this happens over here, too, so there are many prejudices that the groups that are complaining about bring themselves. And these are broad because of ... their past bad experiences, for many.

I don't think people were responding to George Floyd. At least for the black community, at least for me, no one instance makes up the relationship even for what you have here. The dynamic is based on a long litany of interactions that have occurred.... I think we often react based on our history. And we can be in conflict with each other, not because of George Floyd—I think that's where we get it wrong. George Floyd is just an outcome of a bad history, but he does not represent the beginning of that history. You have Rodney King and many, many incidents that people have been alive through. It ultimately impacts how people interact with each other today. It does impact you more in a historical fashion than people give credit to.

Finding 3

Police *and* resident behavior matter.

Positive encounters with police.

[I] had a courtesy check one time for mental health reasons because I called the crisis center and my phone died in the process, and had a good interaction with WPD and they were nice. I was having a bad day and the officers who responded were willing to talk to me and make sure I was okay. I feel safe when interacting with WPD.

[I had] a psychotic episode, at work, and I told my coworker what my thoughts were and I said, "Please don't call the police." But [my] co-worker called the police. They treated me so well, didn't come with sirens. I was not in right state of mind at the time and did not know what to expect. One talked to me and the other talked to the coworker. Police were very caring and talked to me. I cooperated and they treated me very well. I was so grateful I said, "You're not going to put me in cuffs are you?" And they said "No." Positive interaction. Couldn't have gone better. They were caring and concerned and they did a great job that day.

To be honest, everyday life makes me trust them. They do the best they can. They make our community much safer than it could be. They do a marvelous job protecting and serving the community.

I've had more of a positive experience in Wausau with police. I went to a Black Lives Matter march. The police were very friendly. They really stood by everything. When we had the moment of silence and we knelt, I saw police officers kneeling and having a moment of silence. They did really good with that. So far, I've never really had a negative experience with them.

1) Responsibility for positive outcomes.

Residents

I would say interaction with a police officer, whether it is good or bad, is going to dictate ... how you're going to deal with them in your next interaction. So, if you have a negative interaction with a police officer then I think going on forward you know that's going to leave a bad taste that could potentially shape the way--how you look at all law enforcement.

The reason why I get positive experiences is because it's based on the actions of the police. So, if they come off and greet themselves first and they come off explaining their intentions and how they feel, and what they're trying to do, I have more of a positive experience with them. Especially if I know the situation and I know why they're there.

I think the number one [issue] is ... presenting themselves as a person who is approachable. Even if you're out there patrolling, are you presenting yourself as someone who is approachable, someone who ...I know I can go to because I know you're going to be there to help me? Or are you going to present yourself as someone who is going to be very intimidating? Because I definitely won't feel safe with you even if you are a police officer.

I think that the police bear most of the responsibility because they are paid by the state to protect us. It's their job and so, yeah, they bear most of the responsibility because they are the individual receiving a salary for it. But also, like, it would be great if we could create a more community policing culture.... I feel like ... there's this culture where police are not ... kind or not trustworthy.... They can't do anything about how the public comes treats them, okay. They need to change their behavior, and then eventually that will build trust with the public and then they the public will hopefully build more trust with the police and be nicer to the police.

Officers don't know what the other people have been through or what they are dealing with. Officers don't know what is making the situation.... Both are responsible for how they behave and how it goes. Both play a part in interactions. Both should not yell, get vulgar, or belligerent/physical. Both should be civil. Residents should be as nice as possible to officers and be compliant.

It can also be how the person is reacting to the police, because that can cause how the police react. If [residents] are aggressive or noncompliant, the situation can escalate ... people should be aware of how they are acting in the interaction. It's not the person's fault if something escalates, but sometimes I've noticed where the person is being a bit unreasonable and that affects the situation. The police should know how to handle these situations.

[I] think it's both of their responsibilities between the community and the law enforcement. You can't really dictate it too much. Police officers have body cameras and we, the community, do have our own personal recording devices. It comes down to respecting one another. Obviously, the higher ups can look at the body cameras and everything like that, but sometimes situations don't work out the best that they could. It's hard to regulate that stuff.

Whoever is initiating bears a little bit more obligation that that interaction goes as peacefully, with as much dignity and character as possible. Is that guaranteeing that's how it's going to come out? No. But I'd want to take the initiative to try to make this interaction the most peaceful, nonviolent outcome I can make it. It is everyone's responsibility once the interaction takes place, but if you're the one who is going to initiate it, then you are the one with the most intent and you are catching everyone else off guard.

Police

There are certain sectors of our population that tend to be more aggressive with us than others. And in my 12 years of policing this is the best way I can narrow that down, and this is the best way I can explain it. When I walk up to you and you're anti-police, and you're telling me how rotten I am and how illegitimate I am and telling me that I'm a liar and making it so that others may believe that there's anything but appropriateness going on, where do you have to go from there in this interaction?

I can be as respectful as I want; your attitude is changing the encounter and there's lifestyles out there that caused this to happen in these populations, more so than others.

If you're routinely having police contact, something has to give. If you expect the police to be at your door every week because you're doing something wrong, but you don't expect to have to change your behavior, that's unacceptable. If we're going to have this conversation, let's be real about it. What's going on with people's moral compass—if you want to make a change, that's where it starts, not with us.

There are people that I've arrested multiple times that I have very little opinions of and very low patience with and I'm sure that comes through ... I don't have patience with them because I get tired of dealing with them constantly yelling, "You're screaming at me or calling me names or making accusations." So, then, I do what I need to do, and I have no doubt that came through when ... interacting with them. I don't really apologize for that. You get what you bring to the table, kind of. I'm not going to sit there and bend over backwards and kiss your butt when you're yelling and screaming at me—it's not going to happen.

We police based on your behavior.... We don't police based on who you are: your skin color, what you do, how you behave, how you ... hold yourself, what hobbies you have. If you respect me (and I can speak for each of these other officers), you will absolutely get that respect tenfold. If you were to disrespect me or are disrespectful or misbehave or want to fight, guess what? It's time to fight.

We're held to this standard or the higher standard of society, which we all signed up for. But a lot of times, it seems like society is the opposite—where there is no accountability for society. So, the expectation is that we're held accountable into this higher standard, but when we have contact with somebody or, you know, we have to take somebody into custody, or we get called there for a domestic and ... they're disrespectful or rude or they broke the law, where's their accountability?

Officer and citizen are responsible. We react to them in most cases. If they want to fight or resist, they leave us no choice. If they are respectful they will get respect.

2) Perceptions of power and authority.

Residents

Don't escalate the situation. Don't feel like you have more power over the other person. Understand that you're here to serve the community and everything. But at the end of the day, you're here to assist and help us and not assert your dominance over us as a law enforcement officer.

The power that ... the young generation sees that the cops have the badge, that gives them the certain power, and it's scary thinking about if they are going to use [it] the right or wrong way.

I feel like it's like they have power, and they know they have power, so they think they can speak to you any way that they want.

There are many—for example, the undocumented immigrants—there are fears of deportation and separation from families and they have been told that police officers have the power. And if you live with that fear every day and know the power a police officer has, you are always going to be in fear of them and never find them friendly. You will live with fear rather than calling the police.

Police

Our role generally as law enforcement officers is in part to inform people that what they're doing is wrong and in addition to that we take things from people. We take away their liberties, their freedom. We take away their finances in forms of citations and other penalties and for many we take away what's fun for them—you know driving fast is fun, but at the same time it's dangerous. And if we think about how we respond when we're told we're doing something wrong or when money is taken from our wallet when we had other plans for that money, I think the reflex, what's natural for us, is to become defensive....

[We]'re in the business of having to choose sides sometimes when it comes to a conflict and telling one side, "You're right," and the other side, "You're wrong," ... that leaves negative feelings. No matter how nicely you can try to explain it to somebody ... they're not going to get what they want

We're often perceived as that person who's responsible for holding them accountable, and a lot of times people don't feel as though that's right or that they should be held accountable. So, I think some of that might have shown through in that focus group of, you know, like, I don't feel like a police officer should be the one to hold me accountable.

Cops—we're all little egotistical, we're all little high-headed, because we have to be.

3) Aggressive behavior and escalation.

Residents

When my house got raided at 7:00 AM, they came busting in with the ram. My daughter was traumatized from that. They need to look at what they're doing they need to figure out a way to not traumatize young children.

A real good example would be I was bleeding to death in an apartment here and police came in and had four guns pointed at my face as I was bleeding to death. Like, what harm was I doing? I wasn't a threat at all. As they came in and did that, they kicked my cat out the door. I never saw my cat again and the cat was an emotional therapy animal.

Officers arrive on scene and treat them like something is wrong with them and pointing guns in their faces and make them feel like they're wrong and cart them off to a jail cell and lock them and there is no compassion, no empathy at all.

The officer was grabbing my arm, and I tried to tell him that no one was going to be fighting--the officer could calm down. I didn't know the other person that had called had said something like their life was in danger. It was a female officer nearby, and I was like, "What are you grabbing me so hard [for]?" They gave me bruises and the officer was not listening at all and was touching me even though I wasn't aggressive at all. I'm a domestic violence victim and you need to be careful ... how to deal with women. The officer needs to know--they don't know who they are dealing with.

I think the best thing they can do and the thing that they have to understand is that their job is to de-escalate situations ... when they stop somebody. And, also, you've got the whole police force around your vehicle because somebody ran a traffic light. That makes people feel like they've committed this huge crime, stuff like that. When people question their intentions or their job, or use profanity or anything, they need to do everything to de-escalate the situation, you know, let the tempers simmer before they start acting and pulling people out of cars.

4) Importance of dignity, kindness, empathy, and respect.

Residents

Lot of officers have stigmas and biases on people with mental health and substance abuse and see them the same, but they are not looking [at] the people in context with their lived experiences. People are unique individuals that need to be dealt with as such and not seen as their disorder or addiction.

Treat everyone with respect regardless of their position in life. Everyone has implicit value as human being and they must be treated as such.

Be as concerning and as nice as you can be with people who have mental health issues. When people are manic or frantic, they have severe trust issues especially with police officers. So officers should ask what they can do to help them and make them feel safe. With drugs and alcohol those people are in an altered state of mind, so don't make them feel uncomfortable. Be concerning and forthright and they don't want interaction with the police, of course, because they are doing something illegal in most cases. They don't want to feel like they're going to be put in jail right away.

If you are homeless you don't have access to things like a house or food, so the best thing they can do is see what services there are and with attitude don't treat them like they did something wrong. Most of the time they didn't do anything wrong to become homeless, but they should understand what their situation is and what they can do to offer or help.

I think just general understanding and empathy is what is needed ... from everyone in society, but especially police who we pay to protect us.... [W]e can be a little bit more understanding of where people are at, right? ... [J]ust because someone's acting stupid doesn't mean that they're, like, out to hurt you, right?"

Fear can take over people's emotions and how they think straight. There are a lot of situations where if it is a calmer setting and approach the situations can be dealt with in a much safer way. These situations can have people feel validated and heard and have people be treated as human beings as opposed to a problem in the community.

One crucial thing is to remember that when the officers show up it means someone is having a bad day. Especially for mental health, it is not a normal situation for that person. Sometimes people can be discounted when having a bad day because they can be more dramatic and ... it can come across as discounting the person as opposed to blaming it on the stressful and unusual situation.

I don't trust officers that have an attitude. I don't want to see that. And I want their help, that's why they were called. They were called to help, not show up with an attitude.

I guess on the mistrust side is when—I'm talking community-wise—if I seek their help and they don't take it serious enough: "It will solve itself," or "You're making too much out of it," or things like that, it doesn't serve that relationship that you have to have.

When my son had his radio stolen, we called the police, and when he said he wants to press charges the officer would not do it even though it's my son's right. I had to call the chief to finally get charges pressed.

Officers need to be able to hear stories and hear what people share and know how people feel about their interactions with the police. When these one-on-one stories get told there can be a deeper understanding. And there needs to be more than conversations and there is an ability to look back at policing as an institution rather than saying, "This is all of you—this is your fault." If things are going to get better, we have to be honest and let go of any guilt or shame and just be honest having conversations, and more than conversations about how do we move this.

[I]nstead of coming at it with assumptions, come at it with wanting to understand, wanting to have empathy, ... because they're so militarized looking, and it's [a] very aggressive thing going on ... right now.... [W]hen you're a hammer everything is a nail.

Police

I would like to know the backgrounds of all these people that took the survey and their negative views towards our agency.... I mean, I understand the necessity to try to suss out our views towards negativity directed towards our profession or specifically towards our department so that we can take accountability in those circumstances—that we can ... try to improve some of those things. But I think the aggregating data in terms of ... a negative attitude or negative perceptions, it's very difficult to address that.... We look at each case that we respond to specifically, take the facts of that case. It takes them back to that issue or that circumstance and try to address the issue at hand whether it's a criminal issue or a non-criminal issue.... It's hard to respond to an aggregate data to concern of ... negativity ... without having details which we're used to looking at ... and coming up with specific responses to that....

We've taken an assertive role—leading role—to examine ourselves to engage with the community at a broad scale. That's our strength. Going through this process ... we continue to remain engaged and open and not dig our heels in. We are not going to accept some perception without kicking back at it. If something is presented and this could be improved on and examined on, we can do that, but we're not going to take it wholesale.... We have nothing to hide. We are willing to go through this process. We are not going to merely accept what is being laid at our feet....

The survey came out ... kind of as a response [to]—but also during just—a ridiculous time, especially on social networking.... At the time of this survey put out it was right at the midst of basically all these different protests and things like that and I'm I guess I'm a little curious if that swayed the decision to fill out the survey that way they did.

5) Treating people equitably.

Residents

When they see my dreadlocks they think I have a pound of weed in my trunk, so they want to follow me around. I do not like how they stalk they me, I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm just driving around. It's harassment.... Quit following people around just because you have a hunch they're up to something based on their appearance.

There were quite a few ... Black Lives Matter protests in Wausau, so I was at one after Jacob Blake was shot and ... obviously ... people are driving by... flipping us off, hanging out windows, you know, whatever. So, this car full of ... Latino kids goes by and they're ... hanging out the windows ... cheering. Undercover police car immediately pulls them over after we literally watched this big truck with ... a white lady hanging out the window literally go around us five times. It was just like, "This is ridiculous."

I am convinced that profiling happens every day. There is no clear answer because when there is profiling, how you feel about it depends on your political affiliation or personal opinion and personal beliefs. I don't know how to fix this because these things like racial profiling and bias are entrenched within us.

All people should be treated equally regardless of if the officer is friends with the kids' parents. I have a friend whose sister was let go on a speeding ticket because the officer recognized the family name and said she was a good kid. We should all be treated the same.

I've never been pulled over and asked for my insurance but my husband who is darker skinned is asked all the time for his. There is a higher level of scrutiny, and it takes an exhaustive amount of energy to always be on the ready.

I don't think police are targeting people by race, and I'm not sure why people of color feel they are targeted. I think it is a misconception.

I feel in Wausau when African Americans are pulled over, it is automatically the drug task force and five officers coming. If there are two people in the vehicle and there's two officers, why do you need four squad cars for two people? You are just making a scene when you don't even know the situation. I can see maybe if something else is happening, but especially in my situation for some missing plates, we don't need that many officers.

To do something differently, the officer should have gotten a female officer. A male officer isn't allowed to pat you down and book you into jail as a female, so why would I allow him to come to the bathroom with me when I was already left alone in my house?... It wasn't even me saying I didn't want anyone to come to the bathroom with me. I just wanted a female officer.

Any police officer who is really humble who interacts with everybody and makes sure that everybody's safe, no matter the color of your skin, that type of person is someone you can trust.

I feel bad for the police and some of this situation because they cannot call it what it is when it is obvious. If they said they saw a black individual with a hoodie meandering the streets, right away, they're going to say, "You're saying that because you're racist." No because I see the black guy with the hoodie, and he's the one in prison right now because he took my car. I don't say it because of that. I'm saying it because you should be able to articulate [or] identify people without the pushback that you're doing it just because you're racist or something like that. So, on this one, it's unfair to them because oftentimes they cannot identify things the way that they need to by what it is. It's a Hispanic guy, whatever, a white bald headed—whoever. And taken out of context because some peoples preconceived ideas that every police is racist.

Police

It almost feels like that if you don't support Black Lives Matter you're racist ... like for George Floyd or like the Racine incident, immediately it was a racist thing and my reaction was, okay like why do you feel that way? And the only answer anyone ever said was, well, the officers were white and the suspect was black. Well, okay, but that doesn't mean that that was motivated by any racial thoughts.... [I]f I come to you, I came to you because the facts are pointing to you—it's got nothing to do with anything else.

That frustration could possibly come out and be seen by the people we're trying to help as, you know, misinterpreted as us being—I guess having a little opinion of them. I mean everyone has mental issues.

99% of what we do is reactive. We'd love to be proactive and prevent crime, but we can't. So, we're reactive, meaning that we're just responding to calls to end crimes and investigating after they've already occurred. So, like, me as a detective, I get these complaints, look at these investigations, and I go again where the facts—the evidence—lead me. Now what am I supposed to do if it leads to somebody that is a minority or something like that? Am I supposed to say, "Oh no that's not good for statistics, we can't do that?" I'm going where the evidence leads me, where somebody says so and so did this. I have to go there, okay. It doesn't matter what that person is at the end of the road, that's what I have to do.

I didn't walk up with my firearm pointed in your face unless I had a reason. But typically we don't. We treat them like human beings, everybody does. And that's beat into us, especially at the Wausau Police Department.... I'm no better than anybody else in this community. I just get to wear fancy clothes and have a different car, that's it. Don't you force me to act differently. And that's kind of where this starts.

If I treat you less than a human being, that's what matters. It is never okay to stereotype people; it is never okay to have prejudices; [it] is never okay to treat other human beings differently than yourselves because of their beliefs, their color, all of that. Unless they're a police officer—then

those rules are out the window. So, nobody has to follow our society rules but us? And you expect us to never crack?

When it comes to the LGBTQ plus community, I am an individual with individual beliefs and individual values. I am required—and it's 100% appropriate—that when I come to work it doesn't matter which side of the fence I'm on, that stays behind, and I treat everybody the same. And that's okay—and it should be. But understand we're people, too, with beliefs of our own.

I don't have the luxury of a personal opinion when I'm in uniform. Like, of course, I have ... personal opinions, but I don't have the luxury of that while I'm working people.

When I was in the drug unit, we had informants that were just horrible drug addicts that I liked, and I wanted to see get clean, and we got along with well. But there were others that I had no time for it all because they were just difficult to deal with.

And I can have a 5-minute conversation with ... [anyone] and we can discover that we believe differently on certain occasions. The difference is I've gotta take everything that makes up of me and I've got to leave it at home. None of that matters because I'm a representative of the government in what I do for a living, and I'm okay with that. But I think people forget that that we're people, too. We don't we don't take off the uniform and crawl into the locker and plug ourselves in. We go home, we watch the news, we form opinions, ... we find information, some of us believe in God, some of us don't, some of us are Democrats, some of us are Republicans, some of us are more liberal in ideations, some of us are more conservative. And so the makeup of who we are is something that we've now gotta separate and not be part of us. So our makeup we've gotta change for 8 to 12 hours a day and again ... it wouldn't be right if I brought my personal beliefs and viewpoints necessarily into this job. It doesn't mean they're bad, it just makes it unprofessional. And, so, when we deal with people who are different than us, our baseline has to be you're the same as me because I can't afford to think of anything else and to treat everybody for what they bring to the table.

In terms of like LGBTQ plus, ... I'll tell you right now if I'm having an interaction with somebody that if it's a man wearing a dress, and he wants me to call him Mary, that's fine and I'll be completely respectful. Am I going to be uncomfortable a little bit to some extent? Yes, and I will try and treat them ... the same way I would anyone else, but because of that being a little bit uncomfortable, that may come out too, you know, in their perception and they may see just me being uncomfortable and take that as me being some type of statement towards their life choice or whatever. And that's not it—it's just not something we encounter all the time and ... it's human nature when you are around something that you don't encounter all the time you're going to be a little uncomfortable, and that's in most cases going to show a little bit, and it doesn't mean that necessarily that that person has a little opinion of the person they're dealing with or anything like that. It just could mean that they're uncomfortable or they're just trying to figure out things.

An officer treats someone a certain way ... you change the color of the skin and you can completely have a different outcome. It's not their problem, it's not our problem, it's everyone's problem.

We don't work in a PC environment. There is nothing PC about policing. However, we are expected to be 100% PC with all the caveats that ... societies make out for themselves and all the lingo and all the ideas. That doesn't matter to me.... We all need to come together and understand what we are and what we're not.... I think it's just sheer ignorance, maybe on our part—we don't understand these individuals—and ignorance on their part—that they don't choose to understand us either.

This statement that there is systemic racism in [our] police department, it's in the eye of the beholder. Internally everyone ... perceives everything differently.... I'm sure you have negative nellys, there's a negative twist to them.... I'm guessing some of these surveys are in that lens who look that way.... [M]ost encounters are [of a] racial tone before our officers can even dialogue why they're there. From the onset of the encounter there's a barrier.

We're imperfect, we make mistakes and we need to listen. People of color complaints come from drug stops.... They're not always given the full story. They may be stopped for a minor violation.

Please understand many of us are not used to interacting with certain sub-populations, so cut us a break. If we are being offensive or disrespectful, please KINDLY tell us, and tell us how we can properly interact. EDUCATE US.

I'm going to take a huge risk here and say that the African American community (and again I hate the fact that I even have to be worried about a certain label if I say certain things--that's awful as a human being)—their lifestyle slash music slash their own inner society says that "Police are bad, I'm a tough guy, I don't have to listen to any sort of authority," and that's how they treat us.... I'll tell you at the Wausau Police Department you will still get respect as you should.... [I]f you're going to be disrespectful, if you're going to refuse to follow instructions, and all the other things that go on with this then how do you think that's going to turn out? ... Our initial interaction is it's not going to go any better because you've chosen to act that way, not me. I didn't walk up with my firearm pointed in your face unless I had a reason.

If we're showing our arrest records, and say these thefts are, you know, X percent to minority for this, well, and if we go back and look at all their cases and all those articulable facts show that ... yes, in fact ... [there] was probable cause to arrest this person, then maybe it's not a police racial issue. Maybe...there's a different community issue, that we're kind of stuck cleaning up. That is deeper.

[I]t's initially a racial issue—you stopped me because I'm whatever. You stop me because I'm dressing. Like, shouldn't you know things like that? So, it's an easy angle and it's popular nationally right now, so it is a trend that is easy to jump onto for people in this age group.

I hear a lot: “Well if that person would have been white that would have never happened.” ... [P]eople just take that as fact and I just don't get it. Like, how can you just throw out some scenario and then people be like, Oh yeah you're right that's the case.

6) Effective listening and communication.

Residents

Police need to know how to handle the situation and not assume stuff is going to happen. They are coming into a situation they don't know how to deal with. Give the person a chance to explain. No weapons. Take time with them. I am a big believer in getting to know and understand each other and the way to do that is to talk to them.

Ultimately, it is the police's job to listen here more. The police are trained to handle these situations while community members are not trained with how to interact with the police at all. They have formal training to deal with the situation, we do not.

I think just general understanding and empathy is what is needed ... from everyone in society, but especially police who we pay to protect us.... [W]e can be a little bit more understanding of where people are at, right? ... [J]ust because someone's acting stupid doesn't mean that they're, like, out to hurt you, right?

Officers were kind and gentle, and most importantly they listened to me. They need to listen to the person that they are serving. Granted it can change on the situation they are in, but in my case they listened to me. That was important because often I don't feel heard. There can be difficult situations, but it is still important to listen and make people feel heard.

[I]t would just be a compassionate officer that can hold a conversation at a normal level, and I think that lowers the stress level very highly on every end. But then again that is me thinking of our small town Wausau.

Finding 4

Support for mental health crises.

Residents

WPD needs to know their behavior is not always acceptable. Be willing to learn. Hopefully these officers will lower themselves a little bit and understand people have issues. No fault of mine—I have a mental health issue and there's nothing I can do about it but deal with it every day. There is an unwillingness to learn when it can come to mental health.

I emphasize the extensive training on mental health and sociology and psychology for all police, because sociology is important for understanding how to interact with the community and other interactions and the training on people.

They should have extensive training on mental health if they are going to be handling these cases. They are the people who enforce the law and are authority figures; they need extensive education.

I have a mental disability and I got really overwhelmed and walked out of my house and the officers approached me and didn't understand I had a disability and I couldn't verbalize well and it felt like I was being patronized. There could probably be better training for police to understand disabilities. Training on how to handle situations where people have disabilities.

Officers aren't psychologists or counselors; they're not supposed to be.

It is because police don't understand mental health and LGBT+ because those people have been accepted for very long, it is getting better but I don't think they get it—and don't want to get it.

I truly don't think the police should be going to wellness checks because if you're in a bad mental state or in a crisis the last thing you want to feel like is being treated like a criminal and the police can be intimidating.

In certain situations dispatch knows that it's a domestic violence or mental illness case so a unit should be ready to go out with the officer and accompany them and assist the officer.

There is a position called peer support specialist—they have lived experience and have been through mental illness. They should go along on the call and assist and de-escalate.

It's not like the police are mental health professionals. So, I feel like other mental health professionals should be going to wellness checks because they have more training and empathy.

I like the idea of the CART team and having someone there who is more specifically trained for mental health

Officers have come here to learn how to deal with people with mental illness...I like the fact they are training and partnering police officers with mental health professionals.

If they are going to help with mental health or be a police officer, and you can't do both, which is why CART Team is important.... Being a police officer and mental health helper are incompatible. In terms of being a normal police officer in a normal situation where police are required is very different from a situation where a mental health person is needed.

When you're trained to look for things that can go wrong and turn deadly, that is the antithesis of dealing with people going through a mental illness crisis. So partnering with a mental health provider on the CART Team is a huge step forward.

Police

There's a number of people that we deal with mental health issues where maybe ... police are only there because there's no one else to fill that gap or that need.... Obviously [they] might feel either ashamed or not comfortable with, you know, why is it a police officer, a uniformed police officer with the gun, here as opposed to a treatment provider? Somebody, a civilian who might be qualified to connect that person with resources.

I hear a lot of arguments that officers shouldn't be handling these types of mental issues, and most officers would agree with that.... We shouldn't be, but the problem is there's nobody else to step in and do it.... We should be there to protect the people that are trained more to do it and I think mostly police officers would agree that, like, yeah, we shouldn't be dealing with it but we have to because there's nobody else to do it.

In terms of people of past or present mental issues, coming from my own experiences, if these people did have some type of contact with us in that type of setting, it can be frustrating to try and help them or get them to a place where they can get help, because it feels like--just going back to when I was it happened a lot when I was in in uniform—it felt like even the entities, the partnerships that we're working with, seem to be working against us. So, we're trying to do our job and get somebody to a place where they can get some help, and we're constantly getting roadblocks and stalls and issues even from people that are supposed to be helping us help them.

Listen, nobody is more pro de-funding the police than the police are. Take me out of the mental health calls. Take me out of the homeless arena. Take me out of all of these things. All I want to do is arrest bad guys and pull over bad drivers—that's it. I would be completely happy, and I don't know that there is an officer out there that wouldn't agree with that. Unfortunately, we don't have that luxury here because we have community needs specific to our community.

We don't need more officers to go into this department, we need more people from mental health to partner up. More mental health professionals, case managers, social workers, to engage with people. Some of the programs are voluntary. We need to have those people out with us in the community. Somebody without a gun in a situation is better for that.

In some of my investigations it's been really helpful to go to CART because you know we might be dealing with some type of trauma or some type of mental status and so it was beneficial for is still beneficial to go to them. I think if anything to that program could be expanded they work through most time it's Monday through Friday and they're here during the day, but let's be real mental[illness situations don't] just end at five o'clock.

CART has been beneficial. I think to the community we are bringing in people...We have less who are coming up with negative experiences, it drives that down a little bit. It keeps officers out of situations where there is high stress....

I think CART has been one of our most successful units added. It would be nice to have 24-7 response with a dayshift and night shift units.... I would also like to see the Housing Task Force position and responding social worker created. This has been extremely helpful for call volume.

Because there's not enough services or other providers who are able to go and address those it falls back to police as, hey, we need somebody to go help this person talk to this person's mental health issues.... There's people that are through mental health issues going on and we take him into custody. I don't know how that's typically going to be a positive experience for them, so it seems like there's opportunity for us to maybe be less involved, but it just requires additional resources that are out of our control.

People with mental health issues.... It's one area where there's not enough services or providers so it falls back on the police to go help those people.... [They] might feel either ashamed or uncomfortable as to why a police officer with a gun is here and why not someone [else].... We're ultimately the ones who take them. It's naturally a negative experience, we're taking them into custody.

In reality ... we probably aren't the best, and it's probably not the best use of our resources, like putting a child in the back of a squad car and driving them 2-3 hours away to a mental health facility. [It] is probably not in the best interest of that that child, but when we deinstitutionalized and treat people out there in our community there's ... less of a response from the mental health provider and reliance upon law enforcement to be that arm and hand.

CART has smoothed that out, because there's people from that organization working with our officers, so I like it. I'd like to see it continue. I'd like to see the expand, but not at the expense of pulling more officers from the road that we're already too short as it is.

Again it comes down to money's got to come from somewhere to expand that and the difficulty is that do you pull from patrol to have more mental health focused officers and then leave the road.... I mean that's all logistical, but either way I think CART could be and definitely should be expanded.

Probably not enough resources into it in a perfect world we'd probably ... bolster that unit up without diminishing our road capabilities and pulling officers off the road because we can't afford to do that either. And obviously funding is an issue, but as I said before, ... we go do a lot of calls that quite frankly should be handled primarily by other organizations.... [It's] just they don't have the resources at all so we're left to do it.

Finding 5

Fear and socio-cultural barriers leave some residents reluctant to call on police for help.

Residents

[For] Hmong women it's true, ... they're not going to report [domestic abuse] on the first time—maybe not the second time. Maybe when it's really bad that they report it but they have to hold it. So, it's a communication style, an understanding within Hmong community especially for our generation as well.... I think a lot of our community, especially our older generation, is trying to keep things in a down low-- trying to hush hush things ... like we tend to want to do these things within the [Hmong] culture.

The major thing that has made me feel unsafe in the last year is I have a stalker.... When talking to close friends they're like, "Well you should reach out to the police." ... I feel like if I went and talked to the police, I would be dismissed. I would not be taken seriously. ... [U]nless I presented myself a certain way I would not be viewed as worthy of protection.... [L]ike maybe if there is more trust. I'm sure, like everyone, I have friends who have been sexually assaulted and have not gone to the police because you don't want to be traumatized again.... I feel like they don't respect us. There's not trust.

I don't feel safe and I'm young and have gone through many things and I don't feel safe with the police or depend on them. I feel unsafe because I am who I am—not because I feel like I will be robbed--but because I know who I am and what I stand for. And I feel more unsafe and don't feel as free anymore.

I am in no position to protect myself from an officer, so I need to drive somewhere where there is light. In ... Wausau we are looked at like we do not belong or we're foreign and like we need something from them.... Civilians when they need help should not be worried about getting in trouble for seeking help from the police even if they are not guilty of anything.

Nothing happened. The police didn't do a thing. So, I realized that I'm Hispanic. I have a problem. How should I even try to call the police?

Finding 6

The challenge of policing and officer wellbeing.

Residents

Officers are used to dealing with people who are violent or having a bad day and opinion of people in general can become skewed by that. They can jump to assumptions. The amount of what police officers must do and the expectations of them--and the range of what they need to respond to--is huge and keeps growing. There is a lot going on.

Mental health of police officers themselves is an undervalued area. If you're in a shootout situation, that it is stressful situation, and can cause officers to become jumpy in situations where fight or flight is not needed. That can deal with how they interact with well-meaning people. Need to look at officer mental health.

Part of the job is the officer's assessment of the situation and how dangerous it is. At the same time as you're calming someone down, you also have to assess and wonder what that person is going to do and if the situation could turn to a shootout, which is hard. So I don't know how they would do that.

I have always been afraid of police officers while growing up, but now I'm not. I look at it as if police officers are just normal human beings but with a gun, a badge, and a job to do.

Pretty much, as a community I appreciate their work and what they're doing. What they're doing is a lot of pressure, but their job is so important. It's important to be good for the community, you play a big role in keeping the community safe. So don't mess up.

Law enforcement, they just have a hard job, you know, being the police and doing the right thing when no one's looking. That's always hard to do. So, I think that, you know, being a police officer is hard.

Police

I would venture to say that the profession is potentially more stressful than it was when we started and a lot of that comes from potentially comes from the heightened scrutiny, the heightened public pressures that are put on, the more the greater ability to review things where you know everything every aspect of what you're going to do is going to be looked at. And not saying that's a bad thing, but it does create stress and pressures that weren't there when we started. [In the past] ... you couldn't review a body cam, but you would have to ... do an interview or you would say what happened. [At] that time people would know ... and believe what you're saying in most cases. But now, if you don't have body cam—if you don't have other evidence—it's not believed. I think that a lot of those things add additional stresses....

I had issues where it was, like, crying on my way into work. I was getting nightmares and it kind of got to the point where it slapped me in the face, ... I have to do something. One of my frustrations with the whole process—I'd never really reached out to anybody for help or anything before and then I reach out to EAP—and [they asked] who do you want to see? That's where some of my frustration with the EAP is. I know they mean well, but it's really inconvenient to call and, like, just randomly pick a name. The person I did get, she was awesome, but didn't understand law enforcement. It was very quick ... like, "Hey, you have anxiety and yeah these nightmares are from this incident. But we gotta talk about it, get over it, and we only have 12 calendar appointments throughout the year, so if you go over that, you need to start paying." It just was very difficult process and it made it more difficult to reach out and continue going because of the fact that it was just such a royal pain. I had to take vacation every time I went....

I went to a shooting and I saw woman get her head blown off, so it's work-related, but yet I had to take vacation and sick time to go to this appointment, to go see somebody who didn't understand what it looked like to see somebody have their head blown off. If there's anything that I could advocate more, it would be definitely to instill more resources within the department and kind of streamline that process, because the EAP is not sufficient in my opinion.

I don't know that you can fix that just, I mean, that's ... really it's an inside problem and you can have all the services available, you can release all the stigmas, but until that person is willing to accept their own flaws or their own vulnerability, that's a hard one to deal with as a society.

We have the EAP, we have we have a peer support group, we have ... things like the in-house psychologist that helps the victims, but I mean I'm sure if there was a big enough problem ... there's tons of people that we can talk to when we know that it's no longer a big deal. But it is still kind of a big deal personally. Professionally I think a lot of officers worry about that, like, okay, I'm going, "They're going to lock me up in a strait jacket and take away my badge and my gun even though they say they're not." You know, to me that is out there. We're tough. We have to be tough because we have to be tough when nobody else is.... It doesn't matter how many times that you tell me that it's okay, that's just our nature, that's why we're here, that's why we're doing this, so I can put this equipment on every day. We're the superheroes. And, so, I don't know that it's a matter of what resources are or are not available. It's a mindset with us. I don't know that you can take it away either, you know, doctors, pilots, cops—we're all little egotistical; we're all little high-headed because we have to be.... We know that we when the pressure's on we gotta act like ... we're not doing anything but filling out an application or putting gas in our car. So, how do you have those two things? I don't know that you can.

I see more support for officers through our peer support programs, when newer officers are involved.... We have our employee assistance program, critical debrief. We talk through traumatic events. We have our chaplains officers can reach out to as well. We are doing a better job than ever since '93.

I don't like the whole faith-based stuff. Personally, I'm not a big fan of that and I kind of feel like our department's shoving that down my throat. But that's my personal opinion. They have chaplains available—which is fine, I have no problem with that—but...I stopped going to ... stuff because there's prayers beforehand and stuff like that and I don't feel that.... I mean, I respect everyone's religious belief, I have no problem with that, but I don't have a religious belief and so ... I kind of feel like it's shoved down my throat.

We have mental health checks, we have a contract with a mental health provider.... We encourage multiple visits per year. We have established a culture where it's not a taboo to see a counselor.

It takes a special breed of person to be a police officer, so it takes a special person to be a mental health provider.... I think we have done some things to improve in that area.

EAP is the Employee Assistance Program that we can call. And on the few situations that I've used [it] I found it to be inappropriate. It was nothing life changing for me. So, it was call, leave a message, wait for somebody not in your community to call you back—some call center—and when they did call you back they seemed less than concerned with the problem. And it was when one of my boys was very, very young, and then it was “Well, we don't have that service available.” Super, thanks for your help. I guess I'll continue to handle it myself.

I can say my experience with the EAP was also a little bit frustrating, just in the sense that you know if you go see counseling or something like that, it costs money, and insurance doesn't always cover some of that. So there was a time when I went to EAP, and I had already had somebody that I felt comfortable talking to, and it was basically like I couldn't use them because they weren't in that circle or whatever. It's like, well okay, I'll just pay the money because I don't want to start over somewhere else.

I think there's room for improving the general population of understanding mental health issues.... With mental illness there isn't some, once you crack you're broken you can't be fixed. I think there's a lack of information of longitudinal aspects.... I think there's always room to improve education and knowledge so people aren't frightened so they aren't going through a dark tunnel, you can deal with a lot of these things and it's not going to follow you around.

I don't think the police task force needs to worry too much. We've done a lot in the past 3 years to make sure the officers have enough resources.

When they're seeing that person for the third time ... we have treatment doors being shut on officers. The person doesn't meet the requirements, officers don't know what else to do with them. It's frustrating when resources can't do anything for that person. Us supervisors are asked to go deal with it again. Repeats are stressing out the staff.

I think the department is very concerned and actively trying to make sure the officer's ... mental well-being is good. But the officers themselves need to identify if they have a problem and be willing and wanted to do something about it.

Finding 7

Resident ideas for improving police-community relations.

1) Language competence.

Residents

They should speak a little Spanish. Learn five questions you can ask the family before you accuse them of something.

[My] brother-in-law is a Police officer and he's Caucasian and he was actually at a scene involved with a Hmong couple and they were speaking only Hmong. And my brother-in-law, he understands a little bit of Hmong, so he actually jumped in and tried to communicate with them in Hmong. I mean, his Hmong is not all that great, but as soon as they knew that he knew Hmong...the whole situation diffused, you know, because they were yelling in Hmong. They thought that all these white police officers standing in my house doesn't [sic] know what's going on and they were ... yelling and making all this stuff and then he eventually stepped in and said in Hmong, "You need to stop." And then that's when they realized, "Holy crap this guy knows Hmong." And then she stopped. So, communication can help.

Our grandparents and our parents, they have that fear ... because I think a big part of it is because of language barrier, we don't know how to tell our side of the story. If a police officer shows up at my door, you know, they automatically think I'm going to go to jail ... because we were yelling and screaming. I'm going to go to jail, so there's that fear of how am I going to plead my side of the story to this officer who's standing in my living room right now because all I can think of is he's going haul my butt to jail. So there's that language barrier of I can't relay my side of the story to you effectively.

[E]ven the police officers (you know what this may sound silly), but even knowing a little bit of Spanish, to ask your name, where you are from, or ... what's your phone number and everything, that's going to ease the tension.

[When] they identify somebody that may not be speaking the language—it is very important that if you're getting called and ... it's something that is pretty delicate perhaps ... that everybody understands what's going on to start with ... [so that] police bring ... tools available in their toolkit to make sure that this interaction is well understood. Because you could have a 911 call for domestic violence and Mr. and Mrs. screaming in Spanish, cursing each other, and the police are not even going to know who [is] saying what or who started what.... They probably need to have somebody present that will at least tell me what's going on, you know, I mean to kind of identify what the situation is.

Officers can ask if the person speaks English. If not, then a qualified interpreter needs to come and deal with and talk to the victim. Not Google Translate, or a kid trying to interpret for the mom.... Language is still a problem. Sometimes the police even use their abuser to interpret and that is bad practice.

2) Cultural competence.

Residents

Wausau is a diverse town, and people and police need to have the information on the tips of their fingers. The Hmong population and Hispanic population, all these cultures are different. The police can do the research and figure out their traditions and respect them.

For them to be mindful about being cultural[ly] competent about the whole community—not just the Hmong people, but as a whole. Be culturally competent and that way when they deal with certain situations, they I know how to approach it even if they're dealing with the Hmong community, Latino community, the African American community, like, just be culturally competent about that.

Police should have the general knowledge that since young people don't like them, they could prove themselves to young people. I agree ... their brains are still forming. They will make mistakes and police should be a good influence. Their actions influence what people think about them and be cautious of what they do and their image around people.

The most important thing that the police officers/police department should really focus on, staying up with current events, and ... knowing what's going on and understanding the cultures as well as the history of the group dynamic. Being educated on the historical trauma for certain groups of people, and understanding people with mental illness. These are really important when it comes to being a police officer because you have to understand the situation before you act. And if you're in that position of the police officer, you should know in any situation how to interact with any color of person or anybody with a history.

I think the one biggest thing that I feel the police department should really try to understand is the patriarch system that builds within the Hmong community. That's really rooted, and it really brings out issues in the Hmong community like domestic abuse, and a lot of marital affairs that the police should be aware of, especially if they're going to be serving the population here. Knowing that kind of stuff is super important.

What is a perfect police officer for our Hmong community here—what does that look like? ... to me it would be someone who is culturally competent, who looks like me, and who I can relate to, and who I can trust, and who can approach my family in a respectful manner yet stern to hold them accountable. That's what a perfect or ideal police officer that will [be like to] make me trust and feel safe wholeheartedly.

3) Anti-bias training.

Residents

I know implicit bias is very real and think officers should be trained in that.

Like it just feels like you would like to say to ... provide unconscious bias training.

There should [be] immersive experiences and real immersion experiences, not just at a conference or an overnight doing something. It would take more than just the standard training when you think about the communities they serve in; it is hard to serve a community you are not aware of and there could be biases and you don't even know you have these biases.

The officers had a fear for their safety...I believe they should have more training and talk with someone to find out what is really going [on]. Are they sure they can go out and work and are they going to be fair to the people out in the community and not have the riots and protests play a part?

Better training. Bias training or additional protocol training. I think about how much more I learn when I am immersed in a community and if there is a way for that training to include opportunities for officers going through the law enforcement academy or beginning the work with a field training officer. Part of the work is spending the time—they should spend more time with communities of color or marginalized communities.

4) Prioritize a diverse police force.

Residents

You rarely see anyone who looks like you on WPD police force—very rarely seen someone of color ... but these are the people policing our neighborhood, those who we are supposed to entrust our safety to.

For me, [if] one of our Hmong officers shows up to a Hmong house for some sort of dispute I'm pretty sure, like, the stress level of that situation goes way down because, "Oh my goodness, you're so and so's son, you know [me] or you look like me, you can understand me. I can tell you what happened." So, there's that relations, that, "Hey I can relate to you." So ... in the perfect world, to have somebody that looks and sounds and can relate to you would be the ideal....

When those people apply for the police department there needs to be a better background check. They need to have someone to talk to them to know if they are really for the community or if there is racism in them. You can detect racism.

Diversifying the force tells me that their leadership is really looking into connecting with the community overall.

Having a Hmong police officer really breaks the ice because, you know, Hmong kids generally tie to other Hmong kids right away because they have a sense of belonging, they have a sense of being able to relate to the other person, and I think ... Hmong people relate, well, a lot better with other Hmong people, because that's what you know, that's kind of what we grew up with versus being able to just completely trust someone that you don't know, and if they're Hmong you trust him just a little bit more.

I know that they're very aware of it and they are trying to hire qualified individuals to be able to meet those needs whether you're among or African American or Latino you know they're very aware that Wausau is very diverse and they're trying to get, you know, qualified candidates. And the one thing that I don't think a lot of people know is what is the employment retainment with the PD--is it's very hard. There's a lot of people that go in and go out because it's not a profession

that everybody thinks that they're going to love doing, so there's a very high turnover ratio when it comes over to you know police officers, so they're always looking they're always looking for the right candidates.

Obviously, without a doubt, diversifying the force goes a long way. And what I even talk about diversifying ... we need to break through that and show that there's humanity also in the police, you know, and connect more with their community.... Despite the color of your skin ... I know that you are people that carry diversity in your heart and that's what we need ... in the police force.

5) Strengthen police-community engagement.

Residents

I did the Citizens Academy which was good because I learned more about what law enforcement does and I other people besides officers. I learned about it through my aunt but they should market it more so people can learn about it and go attend it and learn about what the law enforcement does on their day-to-day jobs.

I've had more of a positive experience in Wausau with police. I went to a Black Lives Matter march. The police were very friendly. They really stood by everything. When we had the moment of silence and we knelt, I saw police officers kneeling and having a moment of silence. They did really good with that.

There is one thing I appreciate from the police. [The Citizen's Academy] really provided a lot of career opportunities for the Hmong community. Especially for Hmong boys and I feel like that's really helping them go along with their life and gives them a chance to explore careers. I appreciate them doing that, it really helps the Hmong people get the chance to serve their communities. That really is something that I do appreciate, that's one thing to continue to do.

If you follow the PD they're very active with videos, events, even like if they have like cases that they're completely stumped they will turn to you as the community to help them solve cases. They see the importance of the community and they want to get that right. Obviously, they're not going to fix everything overnight. This is going to be a process that could potentially take years, you know, so they're very aware of it, and I think the one thing that I would say kudos to them is that they're making and are taking steps to correct that.

I know that with my time there there's been a handful of meetings with Chief Bliven and some of our Hmong elders. I know that they're aware of that—they want to bridge that ... gap, they want to provide and build that bridge. I would love to see the Hmong to be a little bit more involved when it comes to that ... I like the idea of continuing to have these open discussions. I don't know if that's going on now, but I know that with my time there, there's been a handful of those meetings and again I would love to see that continue. I would love to see the Hmong community participate more.

I've had a lot of people in the community come up to me personally and say, "Wow, the Wausau PD is very progressive you know even from other agencies." I've heard some pushbacks about Chief Bliven's direction of social media and how he wants to bridge that gap.... A lot of people in our community feel like the police is letting the community in a little bit too much, that they're viewing that the Police Department as being too progressive by putting out too much videos out there by trying to bridge that gap, so there's actually people pushing back on there and even from other agencies. But I understand where Bliven is coming from.... Wdon't have a good perception on police overall right now. We need to bridge that gap. We need people to come out and talk to us. We need kids to come up and see the hate, you know, "Yes I'm a police officer but guess what I'm also father I'm just like everybody else."

Try to get those trusted messengers in your community; to hold events, gatherings; kids in school—take them to the police station; activities that involve both community and the police. The only contact cannot be at the time that an alleged crime is occurring. Contact has to be ever going and I think that makes us more proactive and less likely to enter into the criminal part of things.

They gotta quit driving their car, because you see that police car just navigating around and it feels like you're at the beach and there's a shark swimming ... that's how people feel. So, they need to get out of the car, they need to go meet people, they need to go talk to people, they need to have neighborhood events, you know, invite the community.

This is a two-way highway. It's not just the police. This also takes work of community. Many members of the community have to quit the bad mouthing of all the police that started initially and understand the function of the police. And the police needs to be available to explain that function and not go beyond the scope of their of their particular duty at the time that they called. Don't just point all fingers at the police. Community needs to learn, too.

Finding 8

Are police officers accountable?

Residents

And how universities or the military handle sexual assault cases they try to cover it up because it looks bad and the victims don't have proper channels to get help. So, there should a neutral third party, another aspect of city government that people can go to instead of police.

I don't want to generalize them because there are definitely bad apples and good apples. I've had negative experiences and positive experiences.

A goal of mine is to have the good ones have the balls to call out the other ones, the harassment, the corrupt ones. So, they can rehumanize and have some compassion.

There's 100 good officers and one bad apple. Nothing's being done. [If] one isn't saying anything then they are all bad.

The good ones need to be holding the bad ones who are harassing and targeting people accountable. You can't tell me that they don't see that.

Police

I have absolutely no problem and no hesitation calling out or bringing forward a concern about an officer or coworker that I feel is doing things based on ... some type of discriminatory feelings or anything like that. I have no problem with that. They should be drummed out of the career.... They ... make things harder for us.

We all know that accountability is one of our core values. It's who we are, there's more accountability with the walls of the police department than in the community.

[T]his is not L.A., this is not Chicago, this is not Milwaukee. With our culture here it starts ... from the top and trickles all the way down and with our core values and mission, and it is encouraged and part of policy. And use of force incidents—if you see something, say something—if you don't then guess what? You're going to be in the same bad jar of berries as whoever was doing it. I think we who created a good culture and everyone that from my experience on the ... street level is more than happy to say something, whether it's to a fellow officer who then can share it with the lieutenant, or come directly to lieutenants with any issues.... For my experiences it's a non-issue with us. I think we're going about it the right way and the message is being received by the officers.

I do feel a sense of wanting to do good here for the community.... We do feel accountable to them, if there is anyone in our organization that goes against us, it's shut down in some form or fashion.... I do feel like there is this overall [incentive] to do the right thing even when nobody is watching type mentality, if anyone goes against that, they'll be called out for that.

I've seen officers that have interactions with people where I kind of [think] they're not being professional—they're not doing anything illegal but they just kind of weren't really good with their interaction with that person for one reason or another.... The officer is maybe not ... acting necessarily illegally, but [is] just tired ... for whatever reason. I do think there is an accountability within this department, like in those cases if a complaint was to be made with our body cams and stuff. [If command] felt that they were acting inappropriate, it would be addressed.... There's no doubt in my mind ... whatsoever, to the point where I know officers feel like they're getting—how can I put it—unfairly treated.

I'm also not willing to let [another office] screw up my career so when [that officer] does something or [another officer] does something, you're darn skippy ... that I'm going to go, "Hey listen, this isn't right." Because we have the core values that are really just bred into us; we have the mission statement, and the vision, and nobody wants to be the face of the PD on the nightly news.

We're not saying this is a systemic issue, everybody is sort of looking at how we can conduct our business.... Accreditation is having external review from other agencies who are trained on reviewing.... There has to be documentation, there is no eyeballing.... All that is documented for review, so that we have a complete collection.... There are certain documentations that are easier than others.... One of the most important things we can do to protect ourselves is to document. I think we've done a good job.

Listen, if society was ruled or judged or sanctioned or punished the way we are specifically at the Wausau Police Department the crime would be non-existent.

[N]ow ... you're required to talk about any sort of use of force incident that that may have happened that you witnessed or were part of because you don't want the hammer dropped on you, and I think it's good.... You probably couldn't throw a rock without hitting an officer who's been disciplined, not because we're a horrible group of people, but because of that accountability. There's other departments that go, "You got in trouble for what? That's ridiculous!" Maybe, but it set the tone and it changed behavior and that's the whole point.

Our job is to hold ourselves accountable, so we are responsible for our own work. Our supervisors are responsible for making sure that they're holding us accountable. The department is responsible to make sure that they are holding us accountable and there are steps and procedures that are in place that if there is a complaint that comes in, it's investigated to its fullest.

Finding 9

Address bias and injustice in the community.

Residents

To be more safe, building a more equitable and empathetic community where people are more welcoming, friendly, and inclusive of each other would make me feel safer. It has less to do with the police and more to do with the community and the culture for me to be safe. WPD could play a role if they wanted to be leaders in creating this more inclusive environment, even if it's not their job.

I feel safe at my home, on my block, at my work, but not necessarily at Fleet Farm. It still feels like we're in the time zone where we're fighting for our right—[like] the time of [the passage of] the 13th to 15th amendments.

[W]e need to get as many community members on board, so we're not just trying to say, "well, everything will be alright if the police only act right." The police are saying "we're doing our part"... that don't mean no one else should have a part. That puts them on an island, alone. Anything you find out about them becomes exponentially a bigger deal, because they willingly opened themselves up to some criticism. They might try to control it to the best of their ability, but some things are out

of their control. So, in a way, it makes things equitable and kind of levels the playing field for everybody when it is not just one institution trying to reconcile this conversation.

I'm going to try and get more involved in the community and especially help black people get more involved in the community. There was the Juneteenth event, but there needs to be more. The 400 block always has things going on but you never see black people there. I want more awareness. Relationships are both ways. One side is waiting for the other and that is an issue

It is a problem ... that is bigger than the police. People's reaction to how you talk about the police. There is that distrust amongst the groups. And so it is like kids in the lunchroom: if there are tables of groups sitting and talking to each other, well obviously they are reinforcing their own opinions. If you have groups here and they're reinforcing their own opinions it is hard to break through that. So, it requires the community stepping out of their own comfort zone and saying, "Okay, we recognize it is not just a reaction to the police, but a reaction to many things."