

## **Office of Professional Accountability Review Board**

### Briefing Paper

# **The Seattle Collaborative Process for Improving Police-Community Relations**

## **Executive Summary**

The Office of Professional Accountability Review Board (OPARB)<sup>1</sup> recommends that Seattle improve police-community relations using a citywide strategic visioning and collaborative action process called ARIA<sup>2</sup>.

## **Background**

During 2009 and 2010 tensions in Seattle between the Police Department and the community resulted in a request to the Department of Justice from the ACLU and 34 community groups for an investigation focusing on alleged incidents of excessive force and discriminatory policing. The DOJ conducted an eleven month investigation and concluded the Police Department 's officers have engaged in a "pattern and practice" of excessive force; and that... "troubling evidence of biased policing..." exists. The report did not make a finding of discriminatory policing but did note several policies and practices related to pedestrian encounters/use of force/ street encounters contribute to perceptions by community members that some SPD actions are discriminatory. The report states: "This perception...

---

<sup>1</sup> The OPARB is an independent community board responsible for the oversight of SPD's police practices and accountability system. It strengthens the system of police accountability by soliciting citizen input about police accountability and practices, conducting an independent review of the quality of the OPA complaint process and recommending changes to policies and procedures based on community input and best practice review.

<sup>2</sup> Called ARIA by its founder Dr. Jay Rothman the process is "an approach to conflict engagement that ... focuses on surfacing Antagonism, finding shared Resonance, Inventing creative options and planning Action (ARIA)

undermines the trust necessary to conduct effective policing in (Seattle's) minority communities.”

The DOJ report includes numerous specific recommendations for action based on the investigative findings including the need for “the City and SPD to... *conduct more sustained and effective community engagement.*” The report states a sense of optimism that the City and DOJ will “... continue our collaborative relationship to craft agreed-upon remedies for the full scope of issues set out in this letter.”

The OPA Review Board has a potential solution to help bridge the perception gap between the police and communities of color. The Board has been working to assess the desirability of a collaborative problem solving process that recognizes the complexity of policing in Seattle's diverse and multifaceted communities and engages all parties to work collectively towards sustainable long-term solutions. Given the DOJ's recommendations, the OPA Review Board believes now is an ideal time to implement a collaborative process in Seattle.

This collaborative process is designed to fully engage the community, the City, SPD and its officers and the police guild in a mutual, supportive effort to improve policing in Seattle and bridge the gaps between the department and the community, particularly minority communities. It is designed to produce long term and sustainable outcomes – providing a forum for the community and police to engage as equals to reconcile and prioritize the numerous competing demands made upon the Police Department and made by police officers on the community. It recognizes SPD's ongoing commendable community outreach, the good street work of the majority of the department, and the creative innovations implemented by Command Staff. At the same time it recognizes the perception by many community members that SPD engages in discriminatory policing. It acknowledges the damage this perception causes in the relationship between the police and community and creates a structured environment for positive change.

The Seattle collaborative process will produce a blueprint for action by the City, police management, police officers including the police guild and the community. The process is “all about joint thinking, problem solving, dialogue, shared planning and sustained action. It is ideally suited to resolving and prioritizing demands and ideas for improving policing in Seattle.”

The SPD led by Chief Diaz and his staff have stepped up and committed to extensive community outreach and education efforts. The Department under Chief Diaz has strengthened the Community Outreach Section to include demographic advisory councils, citywide council, community police academy, youth involvement and other outreach efforts. They have implemented substantive training and organizational changes.

Chief Diaz and his staff have personally reached out and engaged the community in a spirit of reconciliation and mediation that produced significant resolution in some cases. OPA Director Olson and senior police officers continue to spend significant time meeting and working with leaders and members of minority communities in a broadened and expanded outreach effort that is fruitful in many ways.

Even with these outstanding efforts, minority communities still believe that they are often targeted and disrespected when contacted by some police officers. These feelings usually erupt over events that initially are seen as inconsequential, such as a traffic stop, jaywalking or some other minor infraction of the law. Minority communities also think that police outreach efforts are one-sided, that police are not interested in receiving input from them. At the same time, many police officers feel they are doing their best under difficult and stressful social conditions not of their making and desire to find the solutions needed to create a community of trust, cooperation and professional policing.

Now is the time to bridge these gaps and put in place a collaborative problem solving process that recognizes the complexity of policing in Seattle's diverse and multifaceted communities. Seattle has the ability, strength and optimism existing in its police and minority communities to tackle these problems and overcome them with a lot of hard work and the commitment of Seattle's citizens, police officers, management and union leaders.

### Policy Recommendation

OPARB recommends that Seattle aggressively pursue the proposed **Seattle Collaborative Process for Improving Police-Community Relations** and Incorporate this solution into the agreement negotiated between the City and the Department of Justice. OPARB stress the following elements of the recommendation:

- This ARIA Collaborative Process is not designed to replace ongoing community outreach efforts being conducted by the SPD Community Outreach Section or the OPA. Rather, it is designed to supplement, improve and reinforce the current SPD Community Outreach actions.
- It is not designed to replace ongoing efforts by community-based groups to identify and recommend changes in policing policies and practices. Rather it is intended coordinate and strengthen these efforts and to insure that they are presented to the City by groups perceived as equals, not as petitioners.
- The ARIA based Collaborative Process stresses joint thinking, engagement and empowerment of all affected communities including the police officer community, police management, police unions, communities of color, and the City.
- It uses collaborative problem solving: two way dialogue, shared planning and collaborative commitment to sustained action and long term outcomes.
- It is not one-way communication or dictated solutions; all parties have a stake in identifying solutions and committing to making them happen.

### Action Steps

Several practical steps are needed for implementation. These include the following:

1. Generation of a report within the next 60 days to community members, OPARB, SPD Chief and selected staff, SPD guild and elected officials covering phase 1 of the collaborative process.
2. Execute a contract to continue into phase 2 and through phase 5.
3. Additional report to the Community and meetings with SPD and elected officials as required.
4. Facilitated meetings between select SPD and community leaders to develop the formal shared agenda.
5. Implement the large-scale community wide planning to action phase to create a community collaborative process resulting in a Seattle specific blueprint for action.
6. Implement collaborative agreements and monitor and report on continuing improvements.

### Tentative Implementation Schedule

#### **Sunday, Feb. 5th (3pm-7pm)**

Part I of ARIA Visioning Session with OPARB and 5 community leaders

#### **Monday, Feb. 6th (8am-12pm)**

Part II of ARIA Visioning Session with OPARB and 5 community leaders

(Monday, Feb. 6th -afternoon-Rothman group meet with community leaders)

#### **Tuesday, Feb. 7th (morning)**

Meet with elected officials and police leadership (Rothman group)

#### **Tuesday, Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> (evening)**

Community meeting

#### **Wednesday, Feb. 8th (9am-12pm)**

Final meeting with OPARB