

BUILDING PUBLIC TRUST AND LEGITIMACY



The Mission of the NLPOA is to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in the Criminal Justice System (particularly Law Enforcement); to create a fraternal / professional association that provides support, advocacy, personal and professional development to its members; to prevent and reduce juvenile delinquency; and to lessen neighborhood tension in minority communities through awareness and role modeling.

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC TRUST THROUGH POSITIVE COMMUNITY CONTACT AND RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships

The National Latino Peace Officers Association (NLPOA) founded in 1974, recognized very early the impact positive relationships between law enforcement and communities can have. Our core values and goals have been centered on this concept. Promoting equality and professionalism in law enforcement, recruiting minorities into law enforcement, bridging the gap between minorities and law enforcement has been our focus.

As budgets become more and more strained, police departments must learn to use other resources to accomplish their mission of providing a safe and secure community. Associations such as the NLPOA, can be the tip of the spear in creating positive community relationships, especially in those predominately African American and Latino neighborhoods. Although the NLPOA is a Latino founded organization and comprised mostly of Latinos, we do not discriminate, our membership is open and our community efforts cross all borders.

There are several areas our chapters usually address with the same tactics, fostering relationships with the community, community engagement & dialogue, and improving police and youth relations. First, we have realized since the 70's that actual engagement is the key, policies do not fix problems, actual dialogue and contact do. We also have understood that early positive contact between police and youth is essential. Children and juveniles, whom are tomorrow's adults quicker than we think, need to see police in a positive light. This is accomplished by working through grade schools to conduct such activities such as book readings, drug awareness, cadet programs, mentorship programs and scholarship programs. Annual charity events are also used to reach out to the less fortunate. The NLPOA has programs such as Christmas en el Barrio, Three Kings etc. in which thousands of dollars are raised using a community policing concept that uses an AHOC committee comprised of four to five businesses, other police agencies and a county commissioner in charge of the school district we are looking to reach. Each year a different school is selected and every child regardless of race, grades kindergarten through fifth grade receives a toy for Christmas. These tactics place us face to face with business in the community, local government, less than fortunate children and their parents, and school officials to foster good relations, community engagement, while improving the image of police in the eyes of the public and children.

As stated above we also, pour thousands of dollars toward scholarships for those looking to attend college. Many chapters have developed professional screening methods and select students who have a chance to succeed but who need that little extra to get over the hump. We also engage in leadership summits as instructors for high school students. Those looking to graduate can see and hear from a police officer in their community speak about the career and the leadership challenges they face. It also allows the students to see someone like them in the position already; this is powerful in allowing a child to believe they can be a police officer also. For adult outreach many agencies already have citizen academies and are starting Hispanic Citizen Academies as well. Many of our members are solicited to participate in these bilingual academies in an attempt to reach out to the community and educate them in policing.

Lastly, the NLPOA has recognized the lack of trust between first generation Hispanics and police. Many come from areas where the police are as corrupt as the criminals. This has led to many of them being victimized by their own people, because they know they will not go to the police out of fear they are corrupt, or of fear of being deported. However, we do know many go to church on Sunday, and have respect for their priests and

pastors. Holding one day retreats in a partnership with the parish's, providing a platform where a sheriff, chief etc. can come and speak to the congregation about the department and how the department is there to protect and serve them is pays huge dividends. The day also consists of brainstorming sessions in small mixed groups of parish and police where concerns are listed, and a debrief format is utilized where the concerns can be openly spoken about and addressed. People want to feel they are being heard and this is a good way to reach out and listen while utilizing community leaders such as priests and pastors to gain trust and develop legitimacy in those hard to reach areas.

Racial Reconciliation

Recent events in Ferguson and in New York clearly show there is plenty of healing still needed in areas of the country. Whether it's Hispanics or African Americans, police agencies must understand they cannot continue to operate in the same manner. Training in racial profiling, ingraining the "sanctity of human life" into use of force training, fair and impartial police training, Interpersonal Communication and Inclusive Leadership can all go a long way in creating awareness to the many challenges a department faces. Training can arm police with tools of understanding, rather than fear. We always say, if you train an officer on it, they will use it. If the only training they receive is in the physical, such as weapons, and weaponless defense, then it is no mystery as to why a beating or shooting takes place when the officer is confronted with a hostile situation. As Lt. Grossman states "we don't rise to the occasion in an emergency, we sink to the level of our training". Once an understanding is gained then you can begin to heal old wounds. The above mentioned community events can serve as a vehicle to promote positive contact and interaction.

Additionally, there must be an effort to connect with community leaders in the event of a shooting, command staff can walk the area and speak with neighbors and those effected by the shooting. This can help to relieve tensions and show the community the department values life and is truly regretful the situation had to turn out as it did. If the officer is as fault accountability must be swift and transparent.

Hiring a Diverse Workforce

Many complaints have been heard by the NLPOA on this topic from various parts of the country. As the economy hit a down turn those areas of the department deemed non-essential were cut or eliminated. Recruiting sections were some of the first to be cut back. Unfortunately, many were reduced to one person. Regardless of the race of the one individual or gender, it is still not a true representation of the population. Young children or those looking to get into careers such as police need to be able to see themselves in that position. If you are white and only see black recruiters, or Latino or female and only see white, it will be hard for a person to imagine themselves as an officer. If a department is truly committed to a diverse work force, then there must be appropriate racial representation at the recruitment level. The mistake is to believe positions applied for will always be there. Each time a position is filled it is filled for 20 – 30 years depending upon the department. The NLPOA isn't suggesting hiring any race for the sake of hiring, obviously you want quality over quantity. However, there must be some incentive to attract qualified candidates equally and recruiting is the initial mechanism for attracting equality.

Police Leadership and Development

Police leadership and development has been relatively the same over the twenty six years of my career. An officer gains experience on the street then after a while decides to promote and begins to read some leadership books or take some classes. The problem as we all know, is that in this field you do not enter a widget maker. You enter a leader and a person in charge. It is at this beginning level where first contact is made with the public and the point of greatest liability. There needs to be a greater emphasis at this lower level on leadership and emotional intelligence training. It's essential as leaders of departments bring new ideas to their troops such as community policing, that the troops have the training and education necessary to understand the concepts. Classes promoted by the DOJ and COPS office such as Fair and Impartial Policing are on the right track. Additional topics such as inclusive leadership and emotional intelligence are gaining favor as well. In either case the focus must be at the point of greatest liability, the officer level waiting till they are ready to promote is too late.

Conclusion

There are many ideas to solve cultural problems and prevent another Ferguson. These ideas need only be consolidated. Many minority organizations and associations such as the NLPOA have been leading the way in this area for some time, but without the support of many departments the benefits are isolated. The NLPOA has its own budget and resources, a department can benefit greatly by supporting and attending many of our events. Our membership is open to any race and the communities we benefit are also diverse.

Research has shown that departments that do not mirror their populations tend to have more problems than those that do. For example a department in Ferguson where the population is predominately African-American should have a police department that mirrors those demographics. Departments that remain all white or predominately all white even when the demographics of the neighborhood have changed is setting itself up for failure and for conflict. Police departments tend to be slow to change and the easiest way to facilitate change is to change the recruiting officers. If a department does not have a balance of different races and ethnic backgrounds in the department the best way is to start with that balance in the recruiting office.

We at the NLPOA strive to eliminate prejudice and discrimination and are committed to working with the local, state and federal government to do our part and help our neighborhood and government to be a better place to live and work. We realize that the community is the eyes and ears of the department and we cannot be successful as law enforcement without our eyes and ears. We work for the community and when we have their support in what we do we can be very successful. We appreciate the opportunity, and look forward to working on solutions with the DOJ and COPS office to solve our nations policing problems. In the past our issues were overlooked and our concerns were not listened to. We are very appreciative that our input is being solicited and that we may be able to be a part of the solution to bringing about peace in our communities.

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Enactment of federal legislation outlawing the use of race and ethnic background as a sole criterion for law enforcement in the practice of law enforcement and traffic enforcement.

Require all states to monitor and apply sanctions to departments that violate enforcing traffic and arrest enforcement to races and ethnic groups at greater rates than their population percentages.

The requirement for all law enforcement to have at least four hours of racial profiling training every four years along with training in cultural diversity and include racial and ethnic sensitivity training and provide sanctions for those agencies and officers that do not attend this training.

Initiate early warning tracking on all law enforcement officers who enforce traffic and arrest laws to minorities at

a rate greater than their population census rates.

Require and provide sanctions to all law enforcement agencies to ensure that they screen out through the use of psychological screening any law enforcement officer who shows signs of racial and ethnic insensitivity.

Require all law enforcement agencies to have a written policy against the use of racial profiling and sanctions for any officer who violates the policy.

Require by federal law that when a law enforcement officer makes a stop that it be documented on their worksheet including all information on the stop such as the date, location, reason, race, gender, and ethnic background. All law enforcement should seek out how to change public perception on racial profiling and demonstrate compliance with constitutional requirements.

Thank you,

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