

Running Head: 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

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21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing: Building Trust Through Communication

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### ABSTRACT

My Senior Project was inspired by my desire to become a law enforcement officer and was framed with President Obama's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Task Force Report on Policing. I provide an overview of the literature on 21<sup>st</sup> Policing, focusing on Pillar I: Building Trust and Legitimacy. In collaboration with another senior, we hosted a Community Policing Town Hall Forum to address students' concerns about policing on campus, in SLO, and in other cities across the country. Survey data was collected before and after the event to gauge students' attitudes towards police and to see how they evaluated the town hall for addressing their questions and concerns. After describing how the event was coordinated, I will discuss the survey results and ideas for building bridges between police and students. I would like to thank the panelists for their participation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing: Building Trust Through Communication.....4  
    Current Tensions with Police.....4  
Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing.....6  
    Pillar I: Building Trust and Legitimacy.....7  
    Relationship-Based Policing.....8  
Organizing a Community Town Hall.....10  
Town Hall Research Methods.....13  
    Event Facilitation.....14  
    Data Collection.....15  
Data Analysis and Results.....15  
Conclusion.....18  
References.....19  
Appendix A.....21

### **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING: BUILDING TRUST & COMMUNICATION**

I desire to join law enforcement after graduation. I want to become the best officer I can become, and I want to improve relationships between police and the community. That is why I decided to work with Sal and Dr. Parrotta to organize a community policing town hall forum on campus for my senior project. The event was created around the ideas presented in the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing (2015), in which President Obama "charged the task force with identifying best practices and offering recommendations on how policing practices can promote effective crime reduction while building public trust" (President's Task Force, 2015, p. 1). After recognizing the six pillars presented by the task force, which will be addressed later on in this project, we decided that a community town hall addressing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing topics would be an appropriate event. Before addressing the success of the event, it is important to first provide an overview of policing and tensions that have risen which gave cause for the creation of this event.

#### Current Tensions with Police

The importance of this project stems from recent events involving the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. It is important to note details of each of these cases in order to learn how they affect trust between law enforcement and the community. Ahmaud Arbery was the victim of a "Citizen's Arrest" in Georgia that resulted in a citizen shooting and killing Arbery out of "self-defense" (Fausset, 2020). Arbery was killed on February 23rd, 2020 by a white male and his adult son. They were said to be attempting a "citizen's arrest" when trying to apprehend Arbery. After the confrontation, Arbery was shot twice. Arbery was not armed, and was jogging when confronted by the two men. Initially, the two men were not

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

charged with any crimes. However, the two men, George McMichael and Travis McMichael, were recently arrested and charged with murder and aggravated assault of Ahmaud Arbery (Fausset, 2020).

Breonna Taylor was shot and killed by the Louisville Police Department on March 13th, 2020. The department was issuing a search warrant. When they entered the home, they exchanged gunfire with Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker. Taylor was shot 8 times during the gunfight (Duvall et al., 2020). After a wrongful death suit was filed for Taylor, controversy was brought toward the Louisville Metro Police Department and their warrant procedures (Andrew, 2020). Walker claimed that the officers entered his home with no warning, but the Louisville Metro Police Department claims, "officers knocked on the door several times and announced their presence" (Wise, 2020). Protests were held on May 26 and May 28 in Louisville in honor of Breonna Taylor, the former demanding for the arrests of officers responsible for her death (Shanahan, 2020). No arrest has been made yet in regards to this case.

George Floyd's became the tipping point for people around the country. He was initially arrested after trying to pass a counterfeit \$20-dollar bill at a convenience store. According to *The State of Minnesota v. Derek Michael Chauvin (2020)*, after being arrested by the Minnesota Police Department Officer, Floyd was compliant until they attempted to put him into the back of the car. Once the officers tried to put Floyd into the back of the car, Floyd resisted by falling to the ground. After falling to the ground, three officers restrained Floyd. Two officers offered restraints on his back and legs while Chauvin placed his "left knee in the area of Mr. Floyd's head and neck" (*State of Minnesota v. Chauvin, 2020*). After Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd's neck for over 8 minutes, an ambulance arrived. Floyd was pronounced dead at the hospital. After Floyd's death, protest and riots began across the United States, and turned violent in the City of

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

Minneapolis (Donaghue, 2020). A memorial was held in Minneapolis on June 4th, 2020 in honor of George Floyd (Wallace, 2020).

Their deaths and police violence documented during protests continue to damage the trust and legitimacy of law enforcement agencies around the country. In order to repair the trust between law enforcement and community, agencies and communities should work together to adopt recommendations from the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing (2015).

### TASK FORCE ON 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

The President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing (2015) was composed of 11 members from organizations around the country and met 7 times with over 100 individuals that represented various law enforcement and non-law enforcement entities. After listening to meeting attendees and written testimonies, the Task Force presented six pillars, or topic areas, that law enforcement can improve on policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These pillars include Building trust and Legitimacy, Policy and Oversight, Technology and Social Media, Community Policing and Crime Reduction, Officer Training and Education, and Officer Safety and Wellness (President's Task Force, 2015, p. 1).

All of the pillars presented are important to the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. However, the event presented in this project attempts to improve specifically on Pillar I: building Trust and Legitimacy. Our event was focused specifically on Pillar I, Building Trust and Legitimacy, because it is said to be the "foundational principle underlying the nature of relations between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve" (President's Task Force, 2015, p. 1). In order to begin repairing relationships with the community, law enforcement should draw on recommendations from Pillar I.

### Pillar I: Building Trust & Legitimacy

Community trust in law enforcement is very important. When the community has trust in law enforcement, they are more likely to obey the law, call for help, and provide information which can help prevent further crime (Davis, 2015). Even though law enforcement technology, crime reduction tactics, and training have been evolving, public confidence in police has only slightly increased since 1990 (McCarthy, 2014). According to a Gallup poll on the Overall Confidence to Protect Them from Violent Crime (1985-2014), there was only a 6% percent growth for white respondents, from 54% to 60%. Non-white respondents level of confidence only increased only 3%, from 46% to 49%. Though this does show an overall increase from the first poll taken, it does not show the large decrease in American confidence after the year 1999.

In the year 1999, 70% of respondents answered that they had “A great deal/Quite a lot” of confidence in police. That confidence level, which includes all races, fell to 57% in 2014 (McCarthy, 2014). The President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing (2015) addressed this issue in their analysis of Pillar I. They offered nine different recommendations, with various action items under each recommendation to promote the successful implementation of the recommendation. The President’s Task Force (2015, p. 14) recommendation most relative to this project is titled “1.5 Recommendation” which states, “Law enforcement agencies should proactively promote public trust by initiating positive nonenforcement activities to engage communities that typically have high rates of investigative and enforcement involvement with government agencies” (President’s Task Force, 2015, p. 14).

Though our event did not take place in a community with “high rates of investigative and enforcement,” like Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles, our event could be defined as the start

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

of “positive nonenforcement activities to engage communities” (President’s Task Force, 2015, p. 14). In particular, our event was organized with the Action Item 1.5.1 in mind, which states, “In order to achieve external legitimacy, law enforcement agencies should involve the community in the process of developing and evaluating policies and procedures” (President’s Task Force, 2015, p. 15).

### Relationship Based Policing

The Advancement Project’s Urban Peace Program (AP Urban Peace) attempted to improve on Pillar I in a Los Angeles housing district in 2011. In a report by Constance Rice and Susan Lee titled *Relationship-Based Policing: Achieving Safety in Watts* (2015), they outline their progress on crime reduction in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. Watts, according to AP’s Community Safety Scorecard, ranked in the top 10 of the most dangerous zip codes in Los Angeles (Rice & Lee, 2015, p. 3). Not only that, but Rice and Lee (2015, p. 3) said that, “71% of all interviewees reported as ‘often a problem’ or ‘always a problem’ in their neighborhood.” The neighborhood is also a victim of poor performing schools, high rates of poverty and unemployment, little economic development, and lack of access to healthy foods. In order to combat this, AP Urban Peace created an idea called Relationship-Based Policing (Rice & Lee, 2015, p. 2). Similar to the idea of Community Policing, Relationship-Based Policing implements procedural justice, authentic relationships with community members, and commitment to improve the health and well-being of the community in order to build legitimacy (Rice & Lee, 2015, p. 2).

AP Urban Peace partnered with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to establish the Community Safety Partnership, which was essentially an experiment of implementing a

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

Relationship-Based Policing model in the Watts Neighborhood. AP Urban Peace and the LAPD deployed 45 officers to three different housing developments in the Watts neighborhood. Each officer went through over 100 hours of training before starting the assignment, with 40 hours of the training focused on implementing a Relationship-Based Policing model (Rice & Lee, 2015, p. 6). The experiment was implemented for a 5-year period. At the time of publication, the experiment had been ongoing for three years, with significant results. After the first three years, violent crime and number of arrests were both reduced by 50% in all three housing developments (Rice & Lee, 2015, p. 5). One officer even reported that, “he finds himself surrounded by children who want to hug him,” which Rice and Lee (2015, p. 5) report as being a noticeable difference in how the community interacts with police.

The Guardian mindset was used by the LAPD through their practice of Relationship-Based Policing. Sue Rahr (2014) explained the Guardian mindset by saying, “Guardians are members of the community, protecting within.” This was part of the success for the LAPD in the Watts neighborhood. Through Relationship-Based Policing, the LAPD was protecting the community from within rather than as an outside force. By implementing Relationship-Based Policing, the LAPD decreased crime and improved upon building trust and legitimacy with the community.

The Los Angeles Police Department’s successful decrease in crime when implementing elements of Pillar I shows that using the President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing can lead to more effective policing. With the success of the LAPD in mind, the goal for this project was to create an event that could help build trust and legitimacy between law enforcement and the community by utilizing positive interaction, partnerships, problem solving ideas, and by implementing Pillar I, the 1.5 Recommendation, and the 1.5.1 Action Item from the President’s

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

Task Force (2015, pp. 14-15). Recent events involving the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd provided the opportunity and initiative to improve on Pillar I of the President's Task Force on. An event was organized and, under the supervision of Dr. Kylie Parrotta, survey research was conducted to assess students' satisfaction with the town hall

### ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY POLICING TOWN HALL

With the help of fellow student Salvador Rico and faculty advisor Dr. Kylie Parrotta, I organized a community policing town hall event for my senior project. The title created for this town hall was "21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing" which most adequately portrayed topics of interest for my and Salvador Rico's research. Initially, the town hall was to be held in person on the campus of a West Coast College. Panelists from law enforcement agencies were to be chosen in order to address topics stemming from the six pillars of policing addressed in the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing report released by President Obama in 2015. Topics were specifically directed toward community policing, community relations, and hiring procedures for attendees who may be seeking careers in law enforcement.

However, the initial direction of the Town Hall changed for two reasons. The first change was due the interference of COVID-19. Before COVID-19 was introduced, the town hall was going to be held in person. We originally planned the town hall in March, 2020 with the expectation that we would be returning to class in April, 2020. I was confident that we would be holding the town hall in person. However, I was very wrong. We were given the official news of the impact of COVID-19 sometime around the last week of March and the first week of April. Once we officially concluded that an in-person town hall would not be possible, there was debate

on how to move forward. We talked about cancelling the town hall and switching the direction of our research due to restrictions of COVID-19.

Rather than cancel the event all together because of COVID-19 restrictions, we brainstormed alternative formats and audience sizes to meet the changing government and university requirements for events. The decision was made between both students and advisor to advance with a virtual town hall event. This involved research of various software in order to efficiently hold a virtual town hall. I set out to find efficient software at a reasonable price. The first platform I researched was called WebEx, created by Cisco Systems. This software was unique in offering Webinar features that allowed a setting of panelists on the screen, while the attendees were listed along the side of the screen. WebEx Webinar allowed the panelists and facilitators the ability to manually control attendees' ability to speak through their microphone. This would have been especially useful in controlling the town hall and limiting attendees who were not attempting to be productive to the source material. The most unique feature of the WebEx Webinar software was the ability to have the software automatically send a post-event survey to all attendees after the event was finished. This would help eliminate the need to use third party software, like Google Forms, in order to facilitate and research valuable data about the event.

I also researched the Zoom Webinar software, which had very similar features to the WebEx Webinar software. The price for Zoom Webinar, however, was three times that of the WebEx Webinar, but it proved to be very efficient. Zoom Webinar, like WebEx, also allowed the panelists and facilitators to be on screen, while the attendees were listed on the side. Zoom Webinar had a Q&A feature which allowed attendees to input questions that were visible by the facilitators and panelists. The one feature it did not have as compared to WebEx Webinar was

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

the ability to send post-event surveys directly to the attendees. This caused the need for a third party software, like Google Forms, in order to distribute post-event surveys. However, if you are comfortable with various Google Accessories it is reasonable to distribute surveys using Google Forms or other means.

After deciding to do a virtual town hall and deciding on a software, the next step was to set a date and recruit panelists for the event. Given that our event was law enforcement related, I reached out to representatives from various agencies around the country. Before reaching out I created an email template, which will be available for view in the appendix of this project, for potential panelists. The template included a brief introduction, a brief description of the event, the event date and time, and the contacts of my research partner and myself. The important part was to keep the email concise but with adequate information. Since the panelists are working professionals in their field, it was important to value their time. Also, a useful thing to add on the email was a reference to my faculty advisor, Dr. Parrotta, as many of these potential panelists were her contacts. We sent our professional request from our University account to provide credibility and to emphasize that this effort was being spearheaded by students.

Once we decided on the software, the date, and assembling panelists, the next step was to narrow down topic ideas and conduct a test run. This is where the second change in the direction of my project occurs. Initially, the topics chosen were community policing, community relations, and hiring procedures of law enforcement agencies. But, due to the recent events involving the deaths of Ahmuad Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd further changed the initial course of our town hall. These deaths, as detailed above, were very influential in the future of the town hall. After Protests and violence occurred around the country due to their deaths, we felt it was

more important to address current tensions between communities and law enforcement and to answer students' questions about protests.

We scheduled a test run with the panelists to try the software the day before the event. Three out of four panelists, two facilitators, and our faculty advisor were on screen to simulate the structure of panelists for the live town hall. When conducting a test run, it is important to have it initiated as realistic as possible. This will allow for adequate practice to address issues that could arise during the event. During our test run, we had one major technical difficulty where one of our panelists had poor connection and was dropped from the call. This showed the importance of the test run. It was better to be dropped from the call during the test run rather than when 50 people patiently waiting for an answer to a proposed question.

After completing the test run and working through the difficulties, it was time for the event. The facilitation and research of the events is described in the following Methods and Results. Both were under the supervision of Dr. Kylie Parrotta as part of a larger research project titled Being Ready in Diverse Group Encounters (BRIDGE).

### TOWN HALL RESEARCH METHODS

Before the event took place, we assembled a panel of four law enforcement representatives from various agencies. We contacted panelists via email through public information and personal contacts from Dr. Parrotta. Three of the panelists represented the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) from various parts of the country including California, Delaware, and Texas. Our fourth law enforcement panelist represented an agency for a University in California. These panelists represented law enforcement agencies at local, county, state, and federal levels.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

In order to recruit attendees, information on the upcoming event was privately sent to students and individuals from different colleges and agencies in the U.S. Initial emails included details of the event, topic of research, and registration information. The registration was created through Google Forms and also linked to research consent forms and pre-event surveys constructed by Dr. Parrotta that had IRB approval. The registration process ensured that participants were invested in talking about community policing and provided them with a chance to include a comment or question for the panelists in advance of the town hall. Registrants were sent a link and password to participate in the Zoom Webinar. These steps were taken in order to prevent “Zoom-bombing,” or an individual entering a call specifically to disrupt the event.

### Event Facilitation

The event was facilitated by Salvador Rico and me. In order to limit “Zoom-bombing” and maintain control of the event, questions and comments from attendees were limited to either using the written chat option or the Q&A section of the Zoom Webinar program. This allowed for facilitators to more adequately provide questions to panelists in an efficient manner. The facilitators fielded questions from attendees for the panelists so that the panelists could focus on productive conversations. The facilitators either fielded the questions toward specific panelists or to all panelists, whichever was more appropriate for the question asked.

### Data Collection

Both Pre-event and Post-event surveys were created and conducted by Dr. Parrotta in order to gauge the effect of the event. The Pre-event survey included both close- and open-ended questions, yielding quantitative and qualitative results. Participants were asked about their

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

interest in the town hall and were asked a series of statements about their experiences with police. For example, participants were asked to answer on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, to indicate to what extent they agreed with the statements, “Police in my community treat people fairly” and “Police show concern for the community.”

This format was used in order to gain understanding of perceptions and attitudes of the attendees toward law enforcement before attending the event.

The Post-event survey questions were given in short answer format. The questions were directed to evaluate attendees’ experience, improvement of future events, practical use for law enforcement, and the attitudes of attendees toward law enforcement after the event. Participants answered questions such as, “Did the event change your attitudes toward police?” and “Do you think this event could have a broader impact on policing?”

### DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

I analyzed the short answers of both the pre-event survey and post-event survey in order to gain an understanding of the respondents’ attitudes towards before the event and their reflection on participating in the virtual town hall. When coding short answer questions, I looked for recurring themes throughout the responses. I first looked at a question on the pre-survey which asked why participants were interested in a policing town hall forum. One quote I found particularly interesting was, “I want to be involved in the Black Lives Matter Movement...and I think an open conversation with law enforcement is really necessary to achieving equality.” This student seems to want Rice and Lee’s (2015) idea of Relationship-Based Policing.

The pre-event survey had another quote that may seem simple, but shows a desire to find solutions. A respondent said they want to: “learn more about the tensions that exist between the

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

police and the community, and how to fix that relationship.” When reflecting on this student’s statement in the context of recent protests in major cities all around the country, it is important to note that students want to learn and repair the relationship with law enforcement. Building trust and legitimacy through conversations is the key to fixing the relationships. It is recommended that law enforcement involve the community in evaluating current policies and procedures in order to strengthen trust (President’s Task Force, 2015, p. 15). This respondent may not have realized it at the time, but they were starting to fix the relationship between law enforcement and the community by being present at the town hall and exchanging conversation. By being there and raising questions, the relationship began to improve.

Though it is very important to know why people were interested in attending the town hall, it is almost more important to know if the event was effective. Did the town hall meet expectations and did it change respondents’ prior opinions? From an event coordinator standpoint, I would love for every attendee to have their expectations met. Even though 90% said that their expectations were met or exceeded, it is the remaining 10% that I want to improve on. One respondent said, “No. I heard about the issues but no concrete methods to solve them.” Comments like these help improve future events. Pushing the panelists to give as many concrete answers as possible can improve communication with the community by providing step-by-step solutions for changing policies. Analyzing respondents’ answers on their attitudes toward police after the event may help make more sense of their prior expectations.

When looking at respondents’ attitudes toward the police after the event, I learned more about the respondents. First, 53% of respondents resonated positive attitudes toward law enforcement after the event. Our respondents were almost evenly distributed with regards toward attitudes toward police, having 47% note negative attitudes toward police. With that in mind, it is

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

important to note that 83% of respondents did not have their attitudes change after the event. For example, one student who attended the virtual town hall wrote, “I did think it was informative and it reaffirmed the integrity and feelings I already attributed to the law enforcement community.” Twenty-six percent of respondents answered directly like this, that the event “reaffirmed” or “confirmed” their attitudes toward police. Though others did not directly use this language, it is possible that the event produced the same result for them as well. Even though 90% of our respondents had their expectations met, we see from respondents’ attitudes after the event that expectations for the event varied from person to person.

All of the respondents who completed the post-survey reported that the town hall event could have a broader impact on policing. One student said, “This event can be broadcasted to include officers nationwide. This is a way we can get the dialogue going and start the path to trust between the general population and law enforcement.” In further improving relations in tense times, trust and legitimacy is the foundational pillar (President’s Task Force, 2015, p. 1) and students’ responses reflect a desire to build communication and dialogue.

In the survey, we also asked about law enforcement effectiveness. Seventy-five percent of respondents said that the forum helped officers become more effective in building trust and improving communication, but open-ended responses demonstrated that there was still room for improvement and need for continued conversation. One respondent said, “I think it’ll take continued discussion to build trust with the officers and local community.” One event is a good start, but more events, more communication, and more transparency are important to foster growth of trust and legitimacy in communities.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between the community and law enforcement is important. Respondents with varying attitudes toward law enforcement attended the virtual town hall and engaged in conversation. Fifty-percent of attendees at this event learn more about law enforcement, current events, and policies, despite their attitudes toward law enforcement. This was evident when our town hall, originally planned for 90 minutes, reached 135 minutes before ending. Community Town Halls are an excellent way to improve communication. Survey results show that dialogue between police and their communities can help police be more effective and can improve community relationships. By improving communication and transparency, law enforcement can build trust and legitimacy.

Town halls should be a step taken by law enforcement in order to start building trust and legitimacy between communities. It is an excellent place to start. Although shelter in place orders ruined my original plan of organizing a town hall panel on campus, our virtual event provided students an outlet to ask questions and to express their concerns about current events in the local area and across the country related to excessive use of force. Law enforcement officers, especially those on college campuses, can help make a change by continuing to organize similar events to address students' and community members' concerns. It is essential to have recurring town halls so that community members do not see participation as an insincere publicity stunt.

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## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLICING

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APPENDIX A

The Panelist Email Template

Hello (Insert panelist name),

Our names are Salvador Rico and Ty Schilling. We are students at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and are doing a senior project on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing under the supervision of Dr. Kylie Parrotta. Part of the project is creating a virtual community town hall with panelists from various law enforcement agencies and members of college communities.

We are reaching out to you to ask if you would be interested in participating as a panelist at this town hall meeting. The meeting will take place virtually on June 2<sup>nd</sup> at 4:30pm Pacific Standard Time.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Salvador Rico & Ty Schilling

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