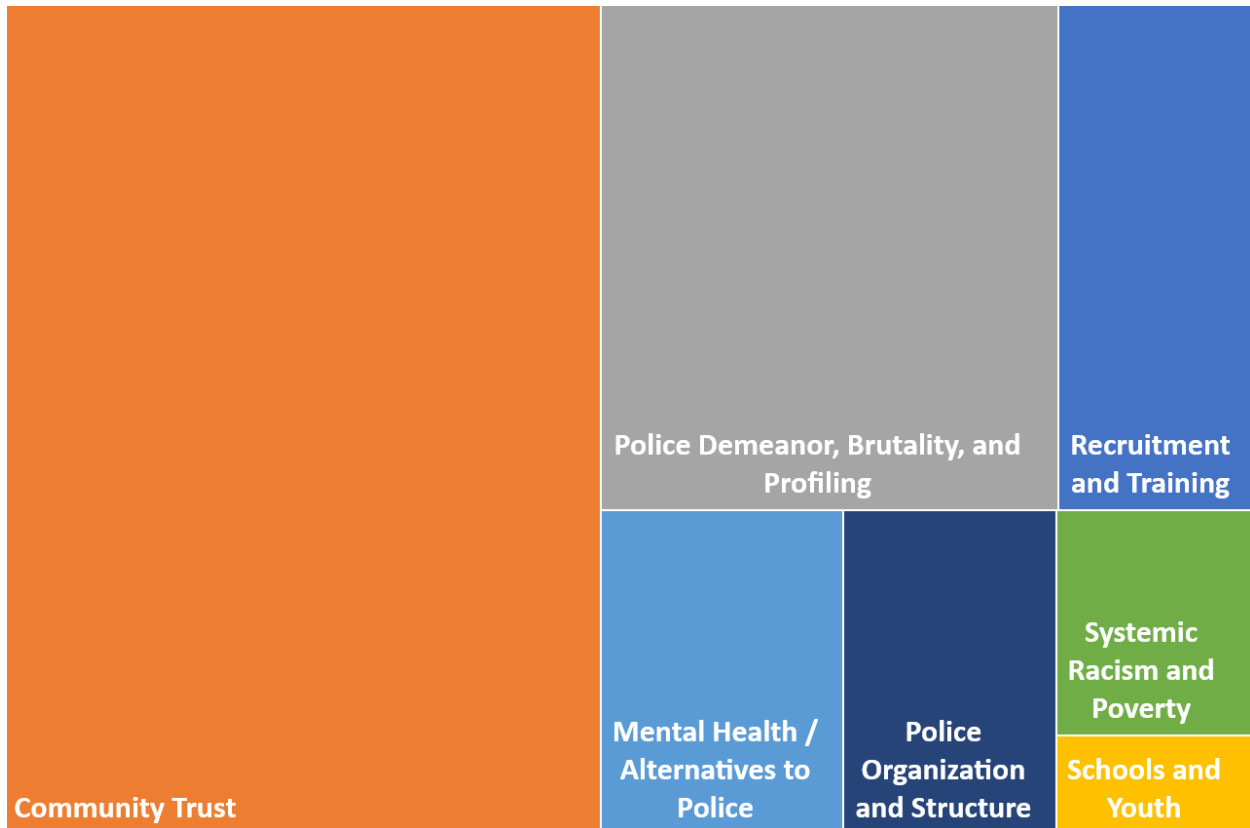


Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse Speaks: Public Comments on Reforming and Reinventing Police



Report to:



Submitted by:



February 8, 2021

The cover picture represents the seven overarching themes from six Community Forums held in Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse in January 2021.

Introduction and Executive Summary

The Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative (“PRRC”) conducted six community forums in January 2021 to gather public comment about initiatives to be undertaken in Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse to address police reform pursuant to Executive Order No. 203, signed by Governor Andrew M. Cuomo on June 12, 2020. The PRRC engaged InterFaith Works, a Syracuse-based human services non-profit agency, to gather all data based on public comments for each session and to develop this independent report.

The report qualitatively analyzes 211 public comments made by 375 participants about reforming and redefining the role of police in Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse. Seven overarching themes emerged, identified below. For ease of reference, the themes below serve as a table of contents for this report.

Major themes and table of contents

Themes	See Report:
Rebuild Community Trust	Page 9
Address Police Demeanor, Brutality, and Profiling	Page 12
Improve Recruitment and Training	Page 15
Engage Mental Health / Alternatives to Police	Page 17
Enhance Police Organization and Structure	Page 19
Address Systemic Racism and Poverty	Page 21
Engage Schools and Youth	Page 23
Appendix of all comments	Page 25

Rebuild community trust is a complicated theme involving: (1) the recognition of the importance of the police role in our communities, (2) the need for greater accountability structures and transparency of these structures, and (3) efforts to meaningfully rebuild relationship between police and community members.

Address police demeanor, brutality, and profiling is the most prominent theme mentioned during the Community Forums, and was communicated through many shared experiences by black, brown, and people of color of demeaning treatment, brutality, and profiling. No white participants were observed to share similar experiences. Solutions to these challenges will be difficult but may be addressed, at least partially, by the solutions offered in **rebuilding community trust**, above.

Improve recruitment and training addresses participant comments about fostering increasingly diverse police departments that meet or exceed minority representations in our municipalities and our County or about fostering, in the words of one participant, “a diversity mindset” around new hires and trainings.

Engage mental health / alternatives to police. There was resonance across the Community Forums for the need for expanded mental health services to augment, or perhaps replace in certain instances, police interactions with people in mental health crisis.

Enhance police organization and structure. This category reflects the “business process” aspects of policing – numbers and allocations, response times, call response, programs like gun reduction, and the ability to access police records. Good policing models were referenced and positive interactions with police were noted.

Address systemic racism and poverty. The theme of systemic racism and policing could be interpreted to be the major theme of across the Community Forums. This category is best understood as being multi-disciplinary and intergovernmental, at the very least, with “solutions” being ones that are less obvious than other ones addressed more specifically above.

Engage schools and youth. Schools and youth may represent a unique opportunity across the Community Forums: there was very little observed input from youth about their experiences generally and in their schools. As such, the PRRC and the various legislative bodies in Onondaga County may wish to consider a specific engagement of youth perspectives.

Understanding the report

Public participants offered an array of recommendations and suggestions, many of which were drawn from personal and professional experiences with police. There was a perceived need for and recognition of the importance of the police while expressing a simultaneous concern about poor demeanor and profiling, and lack of trust. We observe promise in the form of participant recommendations about building police-community trust and addressing organizational challenges that police departments face, such as responding to people in mental health crisis. We observe opportunities for the Collaborative and the legislatures across Onondaga County to address head-on the many shared stories of poor officer demeanor, profiling, and brutality by participants who identified as black or brown or persons of color.

The themes represent both frequency of their mention but also uniqueness of the theme. For the former category, the theme of “police demeanor, brutality, and profiling” was an obvious theme not just for the frequency but for the stories that were used to illustrate the theme. For the latter, the theme of “schools and youth” received relatively few mentions but is also highly specific. Additionally, it may be important to consider the age of the Community Forum attendees: there appeared to be few youth participants, so “schools and youth” might be a category that is underrepresented in terms of potential reform opportunities.

A different example is “systemic racism and poverty.” Some could suggest that it was perhaps the major theme of all six sessions (many issues, like racial profiling and police demeanor and brutality, affect our black and brown neighbors the most). This is a valid point.

However, issues of demeanor, brutality, and profiling may be able to be addressed in specific ways by the Collaborative and by the legislative bodies that receive this report. For purposes of this report, “systemic racism and poverty,” while referenced less frequently, still represents an important area of consideration that is more complicated: interactions across systems, different levels of government, and perhaps with entities outside the immediate authority of the PRRC and the legislative bodies within Onondaga County. An example of this is the members of the Onondaga Nation, sovereignty, and historical racism.

We encourage the reader to consider the totality of all suggestions made as important elements for addressing police reform and reinvention. There are clear themes that emerge, but we expect that meaningfully addressing police reform and reinvention requires equal consideration of all possible solutions put forth regardless of their frequency.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Onondaga County Executive J. Ryan McMahon, II, City of Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh, Onondaga County District Attorney William J. Fitzpatrick, and to the members of the Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative who developed these sessions and who are working diligently reforming and reinventing police across Onondaga County, and to the Community Forum facilitators, Nodesia Hernandez and Pastor Dr. H. Bernard Alex. Special thanks to Stephanie Martin-Thom, Assistant District Attorney, for her contributions to this report. Finally, we are grateful for the investment by those in our community in the notion of police reform and reinvention and for the many instances of courage it took for people to share deeply personal issues, as well as contributing ideas for the PRRC’s consideration. This is the public’s report.

Community Forums

The dates of the forums were January 7, 12, 13, 14, 19, and 20. Each were held via a Zoom platform from 5:00 – 6:30 pm. The forums were initially designed for participants from specific geographic regions of Onondaga County and for the City of Syracuse.

Participants were asked to supply their zip code for later identification between the comment and the municipal police department. This report does not control for City and non-City recommendations due three reasons - inconsistent provision of zip codes, the appearance of geographic mixing for the sessions, and making “global” recommendations about police rather than specific to the commenter’s location. More importantly, the themes that emerged from these sessions appear to be broadly applicable across municipalities within Onondaga County. There are specific references to certain municipalities which are identified in more detail below, but these are derived from the public comments rather than attributable by zip code.

Total attendance across the six Community Forums was 375 participants on a session-by-session basis. Multiple people attended multiple sessions and not everyone attended the entirety of their session. Attendance was determined by Zoom participant lists provided in Excel format, with duplicate names per session deleted. Duplicate entries appear likely due to connectivity interruptions requiring participants to reenter the meeting and thus be logged as a new participant by Zoom.

Table 1: Attendance by session

Date	Attendance
January 7, 2021	55
January 12, 2021	70
January 13, 2021	81
January 14, 2021	68
January 19, 2021	54
January 20, 2021	47
Total Attendance	375

The Community Forums were facilitated by Nodesia Hernandez and Pastor Dr. H. Bernard Alex, each of whom served as the lead facilitator for three sessions each. The sessions were opened by members of the PRRC by setting the framework for each discussion. The sessions were designed and initially conducted to be listening sessions for Collaborative and law enforcement

members, but government leaders did address specific inquiries raised by public participants. It was common, for example, for City and County government leaders to indicate if a citizen complaint was received and was being acted upon.

There were a total of 211 separate suggestions made by the public during the six Community Forums, for an average of approximately 35 suggestions per Community Forum. Participants often made more than one suggestion.

Analysis

Offered below in chart and table format is a framework to understand the complicated and interwoven themes that emerged from the six Community Forums. Chart 1 and Table 2, below,

represent the seven Overarching Themes that emerged from analyzing the 211 public comments.



ANALYSIS FOR EACH OF THE SEVEN THEMES
INCLUDES:

- CHART WITH SUB-THEMES
- TABLE WITH SUB-THEME FREQUENCY
- DISCUSSION

The charts and tables that follow (Charts 2-8 and Tables 3-9) are an analysis of each of the seven themes along with the sub-themes for each.

Analysis: Overarching Themes

Chart 1: Overarching Themes

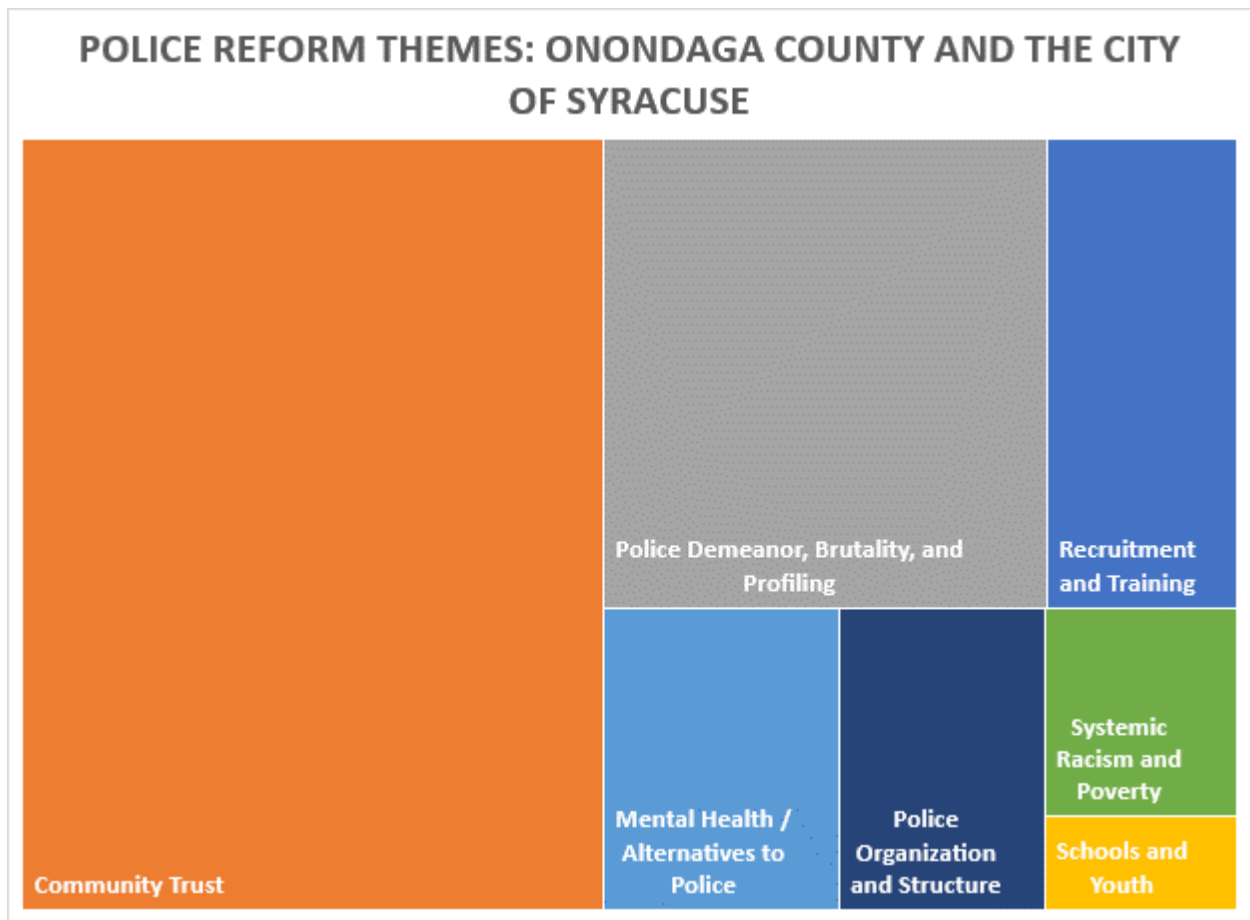


Table 2: Overarching Themes and Frequency

Themes	Frequency (Percent)
Rebuild Community Trust	101 (48%)
Address Police Demeanor, Brutality, and Profiling	47 (22%)
Improve Recruitment and Training	20 (9%)
Engage Mental Health / Alternatives to Police	16 (8%)
Police Organization and Structure	14 (7%)
Address Systemic Racism and Poverty	9 (4%)
Engage Schools and Youth	4 (2%)
Total comments	211 (100%)

Discussion: These seven themes emerged across analysis of 211 public participant comments (answers by public officials in their official contexts are not included). Details for each of these overarching themes are described below, with corresponding charts and tables for frequency.

Analysis: Rebuild Community Trust

Chart 2: Rebuild Community Trust

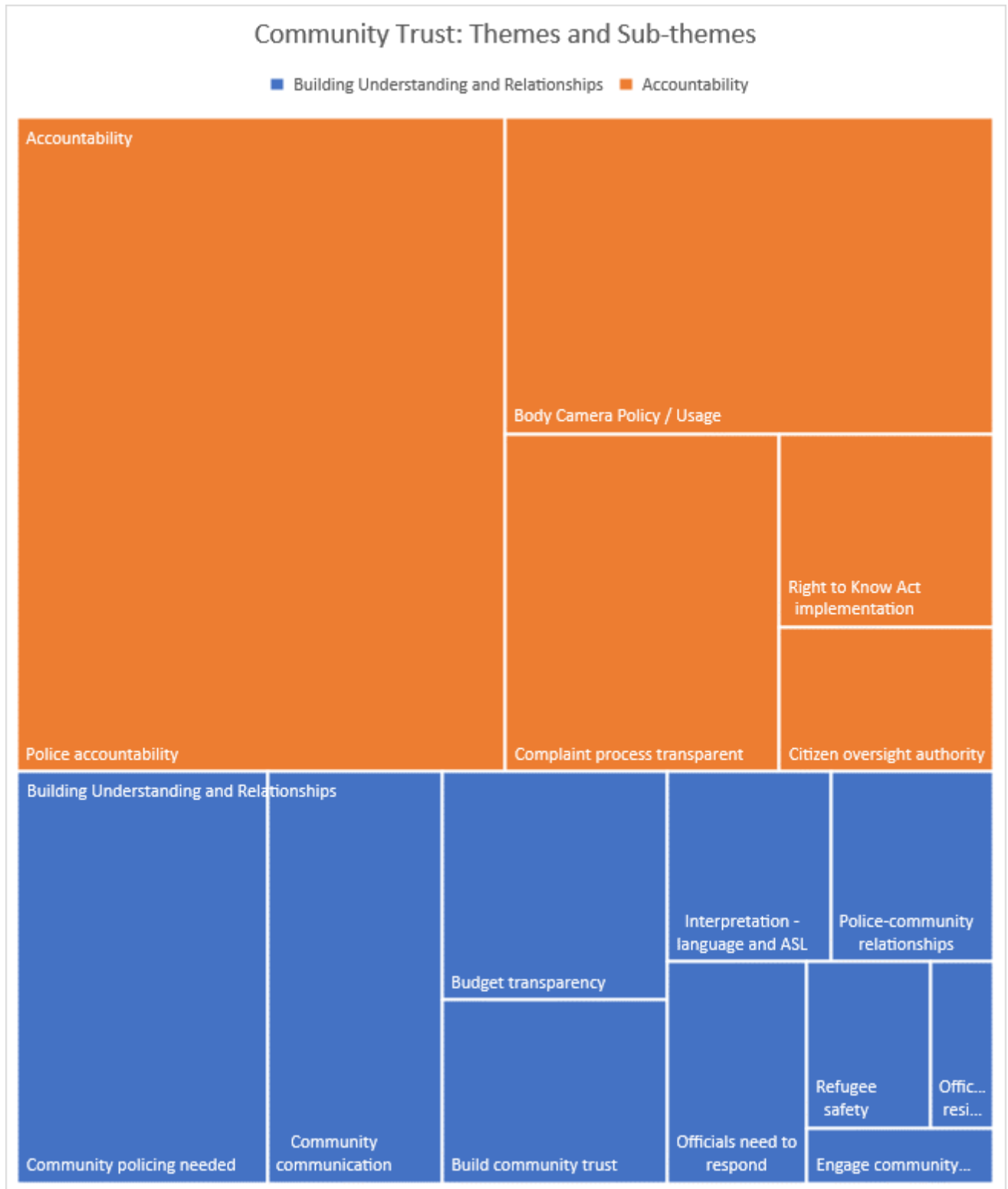


Table 3: Rebuild Community Trust: Sub-themes and Frequency

Accountability	Sub-theme frequency	Building Understanding and Relationships	Sub-theme frequency
Police accountability	31	Interpretation - language and ASL	3
Complaint process transparent	9	Build community trust	4
Citizen oversight authority	3	Police-community relationships	3
Body Camera Policy / Usage	15	Community communication	7
Right to Know Act implementation	4	Officer residency	1
		Refugee safety	2
		Community policing needed	10
		Budget transparency	5
		Engage community leaders	1
		Officials need to respond	3
Total	62	Total	39

Discussion: Two aspects of rebuilding community trust emerged: accountability combined with building understanding and relationships, for the most frequently mentioned and most detailed theme. For accountability, public participants indicated that police are not accountable for their actions and generally spoke to a lack of transparency about the complaint process and relatively new laws and policies, like the Right to Know Act and body cameras. It is worth noting that many participants appreciated the Community Forums as a method to have questions answered, which may be a future-forward strategy the PRRC or legislatures might employ.

The category of building understanding and relationships was varied, but community policing was a clear theme. Participants spoke to the ideals of community policing – officers being less distant and more interactive with the communities they patrol and protect, to build better



POLICE SHOULD HAVE THE PHONE NUMBERS FOR INTERPRETER AGENCIES, OR USE IPADS FOR “ON DEMAND” INTERPRETATION, WHEN RESPONDING TO A CALL INVOLVING NEW AMERICANS, HISPANICS, OR DEAF CITIZENS.

relationships. Communication follow-through (often frustration was expressed when initial communications with officers occurred but there was no follow-up). Building relationships and trust are effective ways to combat what might be negative behaviors of a few. When trusted relationships are formed, there may be less inclination to paint an entire police department with the “same brush.”

The sub-theme “citizen oversight authority” was specific to the City of Syracuse Citizen Review Board and the interest to expand its oversight authority.

It was suggested that police accessing language, including ASL interpreters, would greatly facilitate building trust but more fairly addressing matters involving police.

“Officer residency” refers to the perceive need that officers live in the municipality which they patrol.

Analysis: Police Brutality, Demeanor, and Profiling

Chart 3: Police Brutality, Demeanor, and Profiling

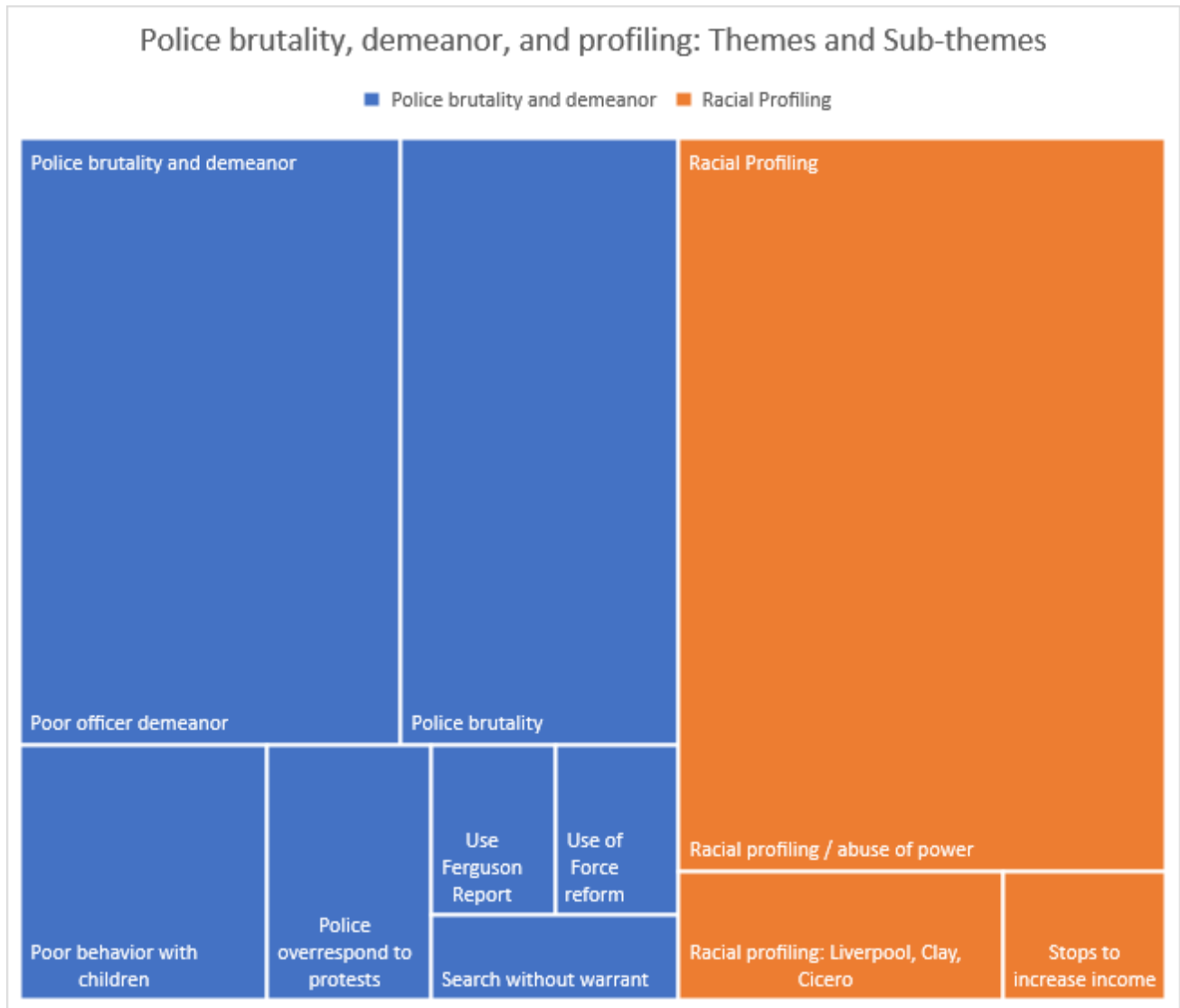




Table 4: Police Brutality, Demeanor, and Profiling: Sub-themes and Frequency

Police brutality and demeanor	Sub-theme frequency	Racial profiling	Sub-theme frequency
Police brutality	8	Racial profiling / abuse of power	17
Poor behavior with children	3	Racial profiling: Liverpool, Clay, Cicero	2
Poor officer demeanor	11	Stops to increase income	1
Police overrespond to protests	2		
Use Ferguson Report	1		
Use of Force reform	1		
Search without warrant	1		
Total	27	Total	20

Discussion: Public comments in this category are among the most challenging to hear, as they involved participants – most, if not all, were people who identified as black, brown, or people of color – having to expose episodes of personal trauma. The stories below are representative of the many experiences shared during the six Community Forums and represent a pattern of experience for black and brown people. There were specific municipalities that were identified during the sessions. An interesting response from several public officials who identify as black or brown – whose remarks are generally not included in this report – was that they now actively use their vehicle’s cruise control to help ensure they do not speed generally, but in certain municipalities. The category of racial profiling in Liverpool would be represented by 5 people if public official remarks are included.



I WAS HEADING HOME ON SATURDAY WHEN
I'M PULLED OVER IN MY VEHICLE. I WAS
PUSHED TO THE GROUND AND CUSSSED AT.
I'M PULLED OVER ALL THE TIME. PEOPLE
DON'T SPEAK UP BECAUSE WE GET NUMB TO
THIS TYPE OF TREATMENT. THIS TIME THE
OFFICER PUT HIS HANDS ON ME, WHICH
WAS DIFFERENT. I'M NOT A BAD GUY — I
HAVE A SON, I WORK IN PHOTOGRAPHY.
THE COLOR OF MY SKIN, MY MUSIC, MY
CLOTHES SHOULDN'T GET ME PULLED OVER.
WE ARE GETTING TIRED OF IT. WE GET
TICKETS, YOU GET MONEY. SOMETHING HAS
TO CHANGE.



I HAVE CONVERSATIONS WITH MY SON
ABOUT WHAT TO DO IF PULLED OVER
BY POLICE WHICH MY WHITE FRIENDS
DO NOT HAVE: PUT YOUR HANDS ON
THE STEERING WHEEL, NO SUDDEN
MOVES, DON'T ARGUE, DON'T REACH
FOR YOUR PHONE, COMPLY WITH
ORDERS, "'YES, SIR' AND 'YES,
MA'AM.'"

Analysis: Recruitment and Training

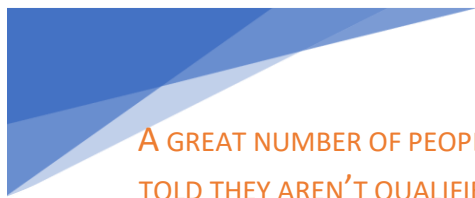
Chart 4: Recruitment and Training



Table 5: Recruitment and Training: Sub-themes and Frequency

Recruitment	Sub-theme frequency	Training	Sub-theme frequency
Recruit more people of color	4	Academy and field training don't align	1
Hire people with a diversity mindset	1	De-escalation training	1
Improve recruitment	3	Diversity training	4
Improve the Syracuse Police Department recruitment process	1	Supervisor training	2
Consider adding a college degree requirement	1	Conflict resolution: Sergeants and higher	1
Make the test fairer for more diverse groups	1	Conflict resolution: Sergeants and higher	1
Total	11	Total	9

Discussion: The themes for recruitment and training address the underlying participant comments about fostering increasingly diverse police departments that meet or exceed minority representations in our municipalities and our County or about fostering, in the words of one



A GREAT NUMBER OF PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE TOLD THEY AREN'T QUALIFIED TO WORK FOR POLICE DEPARTMENTS — NO JOB EXPERIENCE, OUTSTANDING MEDICAL BILLS — THINGS THAT SHOULDN'T ORDINARILY DISQUALIFY PEOPLE. THESE ISSUES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED.

participant, “a diversity mindset” around new hires and trainings. It is worth noting the comments oriented to police supervisors and those in ranks of Sergeant and above: these comments are intended to identify specific targets for training to address some of the officer behaviors articulated in the theme of **police demeanor, brutality, and profiling**, above, and to provide support for those supervisors to engage in culture change around accountability for poor demeanor.

Analysis: Mental Health

Chart 5: Mental Health

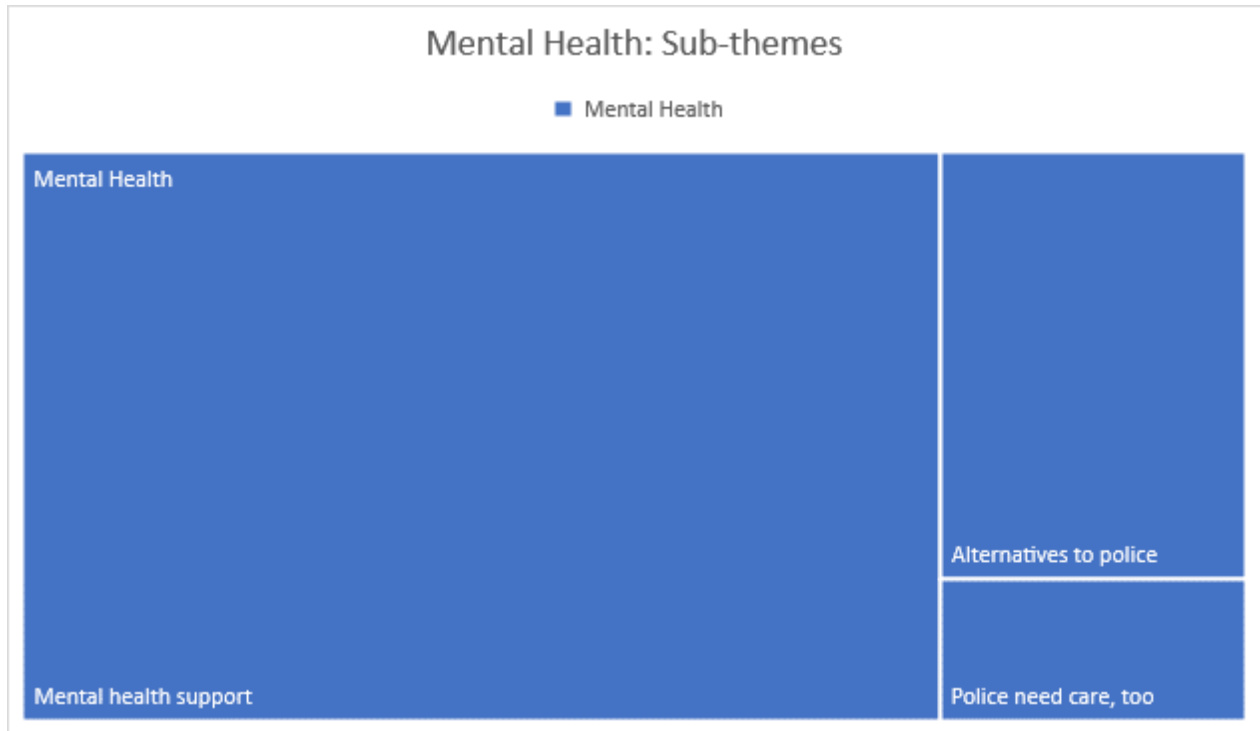



Table 6: Mental Health

Sub-theme	Frequency
Mental health support	12
Alternatives to police	3
Police need care, too	1
Total	17



THERE SHOULD BE MORE INVESTMENT IN
COUNSELING IN OUR BLACK AND BROWN
COMMUNITIES RATHER THAN A STRONG
POLICE PRESENCE.

services to produce better outcomes. It was noted that police officers may need mental health care, too, due to the stressors of their work.

Discussion: There was resonance across the Community Forums for the need for expanded mental health services to augment, or perhaps replace in certain instances, police interactions with people in mental health crisis. In this context, the idea of Crisis Response Teams was raised. Some participants felt that police budgets should be reduced and these new funds should be directed towards expanded mental health

Analysis: Police Organization and Structure

Chart 6: Police Organization and Structure

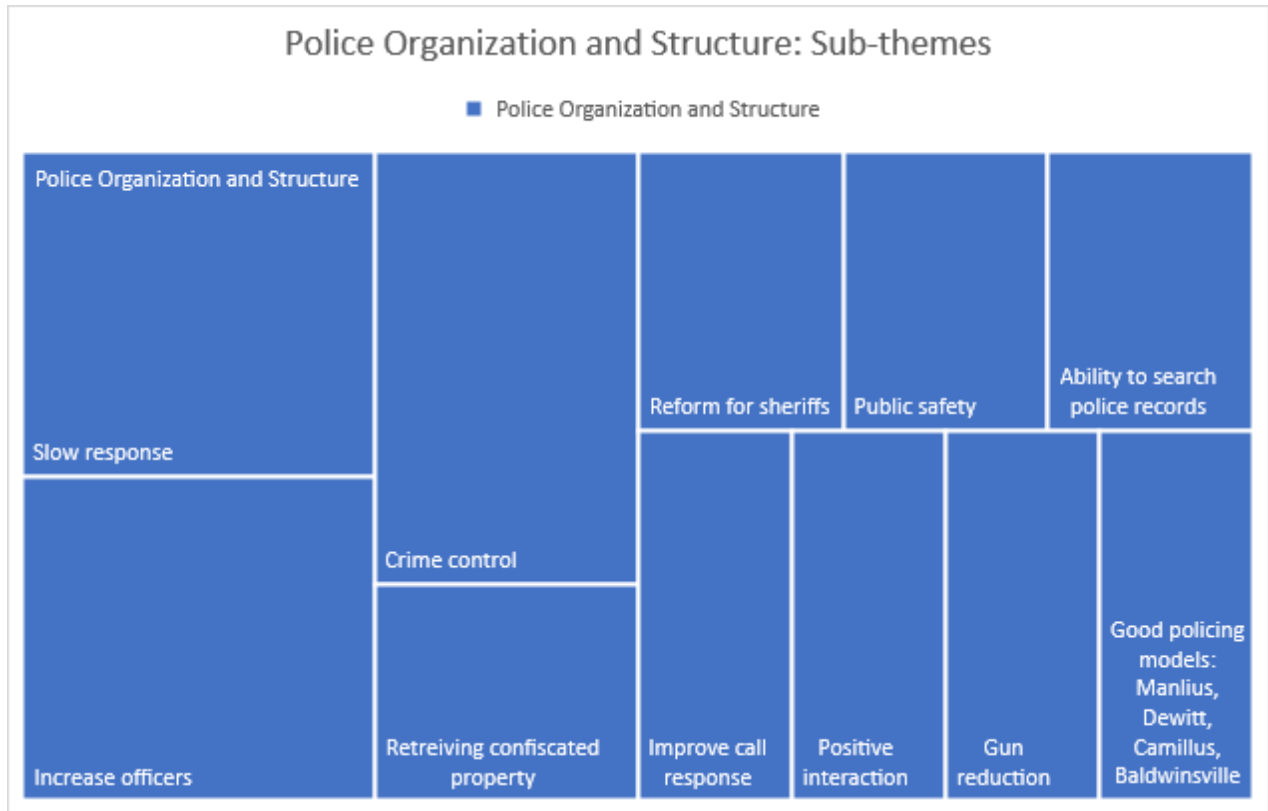
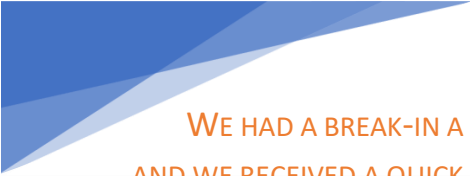


Table 7: Police Organization and Structure: Sub-themes and Frequency

Themes	Frequency
Slow response	2
Increase officers	2
Crime control	2
Reform for sheriffs	1
Public safety	1

Ability to search police records	1
Retrieving confiscated property	1
Improve call response	1
Positive interaction	1
Gun reduction	1
Good policing models: Manlius, Dewitt, Camillus, Baldwinsville	1
Total	14

Discussion: This category reflects in many ways the “business process” aspects of policing – numbers and allocations, response times, call response, programs like gun reduction, and the ability to access police records. Good policing models were referenced: Manlius, Dewitt, Camillus, and Baldwinsville. It was here, too, that positive interactions with police were noted. It is worth noting that there were some mentions of neutral encounters with police, being neither good nor bad. When these neutral comments arose, they sometimes took the form of “I’ve never had a reason to be afraid of the police.”



WE HAD A BREAK-IN A FEW WEEKS AGO AND WE RECEIVED A QUICK RESPONSE FROM SPD AND A STATE TROOPER, WHICH WAS A VERY POSITIVE AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSE.



IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD THE RESPONSE TIME IS 10-15 MINUTES. ABYSMAL.

Analysis: Systemic Racism and Poverty

Chart 7: Systemic Racism and Poverty

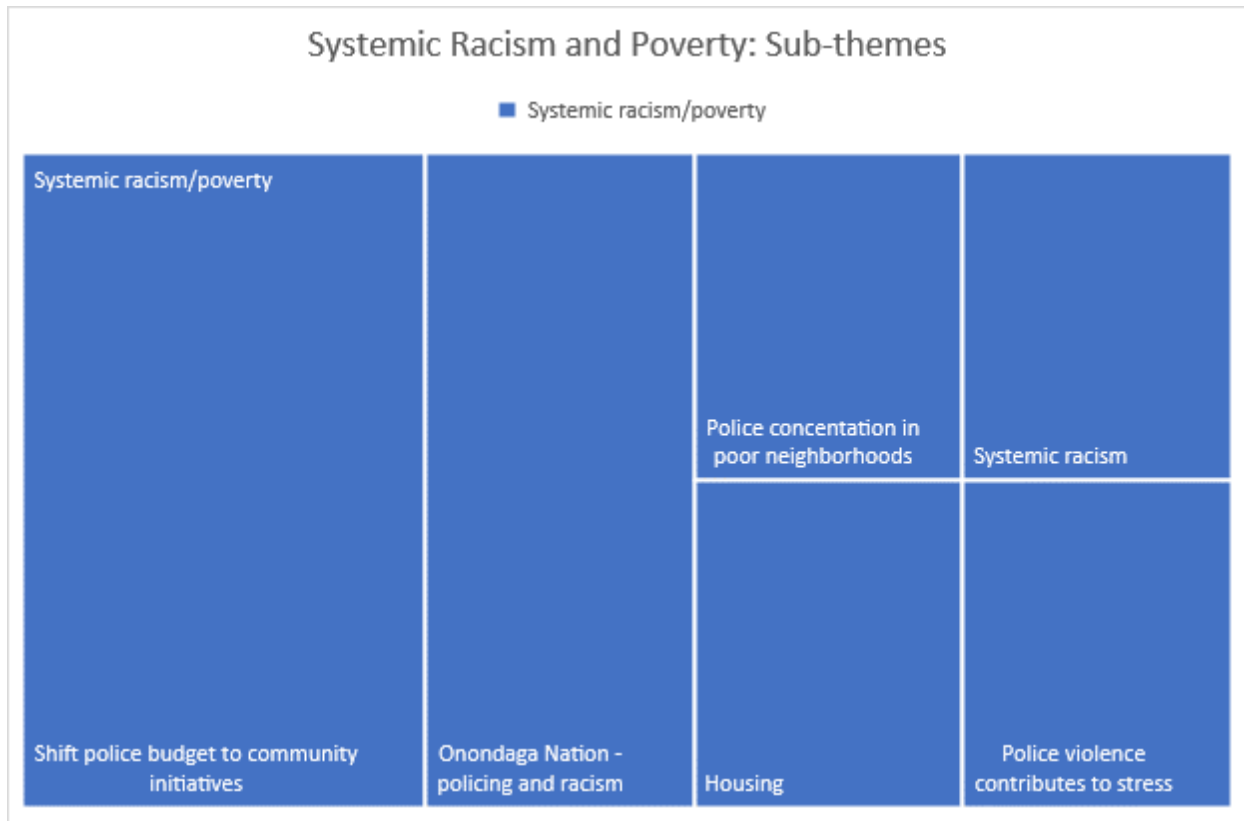


Table 8: Systemic Racism and Policing

Sub-theme	Frequency
Onondaga Nation - policing and racism	2
Police concentration in poor neighborhoods	1
Systemic racism	1
Housing	1
Police violence contributes to stress	1
Shift police budget to community initiatives	3
Total	9

Discussion: As mentioned in the introduction above, the theme of systemic racism and policing could be interpreted to be the major theme of across the Community Forums. This category is best understood as being multi-disciplinary and intergovernmental, at the very least, with “solutions” being ones that are less obvious than other ones addressed more specifically above, such as trainings on diversity and inclusion.



SYSTEMIC RACISM IS A PUBLIC HEALTH
THREAT TO BLACK AMERICANS ... BAD
INTERACTIONS WITH POLICE AFFECT OUR
COMMUNITY'S MENTAL HEALTH AND
SUICIDE RATES.



WHY DOESN'T A SINGLE POLICE OFFICER
CARRY "CONSENT TO POLICE" THE STOLEN
LAND OF THE HAUDENOSAUNEE?

Analysis: Schools and Youth

Chart 8: Schools and Youth

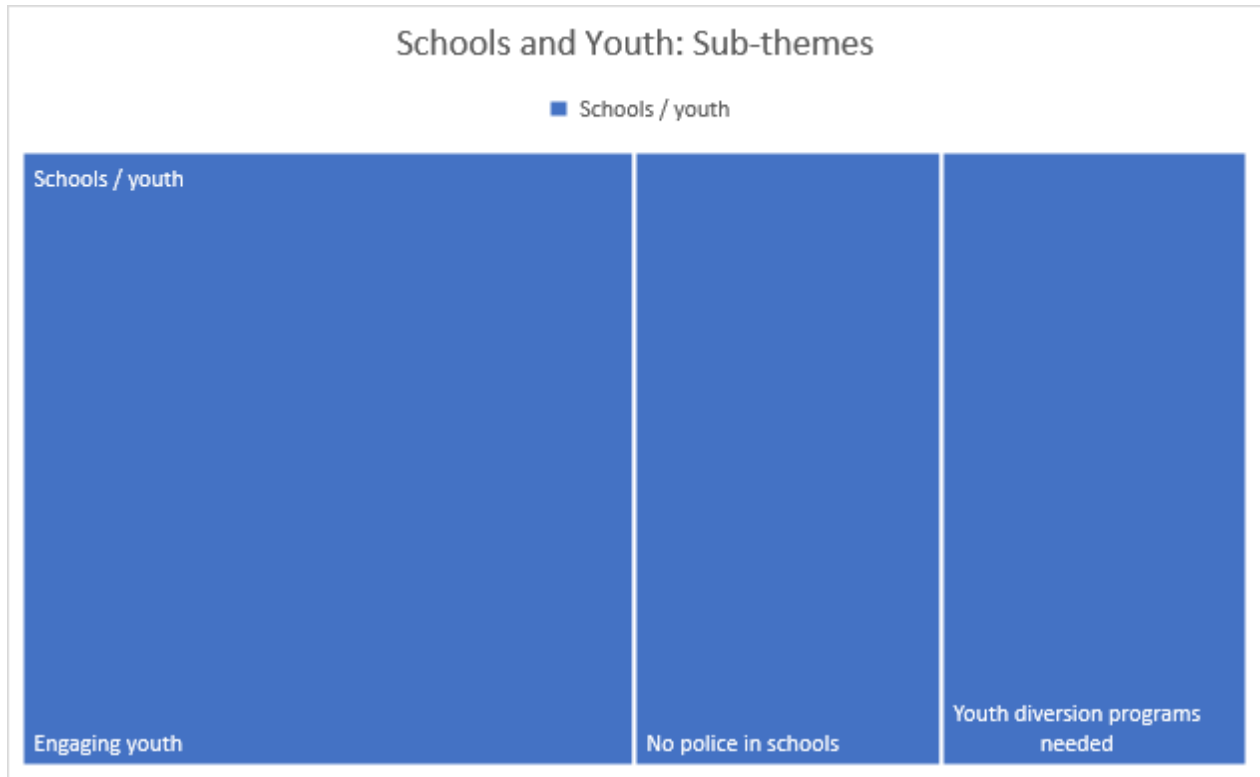


Table 9: Schools and Youth

Sub-theme	Frequency
No police in schools	1
Youth diversion programs needed	1
Engaging youth	2
Total	4

Discussion: Schools and youth may represent a unique opportunity across the Community Forums: there was very little observed input from youth about their experiences generally and in their schools. While there were examples offered of observing youth and police interactions – none of these were positive – it was unclear about how youth themselves react to police. As



WE SHOULD INVEST IN ALREADY-
ESTABLISHED YOUTH PROGRAMS WORKING
TO DIVERT YOUTH FROM THE JUSTICE
SYSTEM ALREADY ESTABLISHED.

such, an opportunity for the PRRC and the various legislative bodies in Onondaga County to consider is specific engagement of youth perspectives. It is worth noting that “no police in schools” is a reference to not wishing to see police in schools, rather than an observation to address a possible lack of police presence in schools.

Appendix: Total Community Forum themes, arranged in alphabetical order

Abuse of Power by the Police
Abuse of power by the Police
Alternatives to policing in poor communities
Apply recommendations of Ferguson Report
Being kept informed of the Collaborative's progress
Better Recruitment programs
Body Camera Policy
Body Camera policy
Body Camera should on on the whole shift
Body Camera Usage
Body Camera Usage
Body Camera Usage
Body Camera Usage
Body Camera Usage
Body Camera Usage and Responsibility
Body camera use questions.
Body cameras – keep them on
Body cameras – process should be transparent
Body cameras for Onondaga Sheriff needed
Body cameras questions
Body cameras should always be on
Budget
Budget
Building Trust with the Community
Call Response
Citizen Treatment
Citizen Treatment
Citizen's Rights
Clarifying CRB roles with the community
Communication follow through is lacking
Community communication
Community communication
Community Communication lacking
Community communication: follow up on conversations
Community Engagement
Community leaders get more detailed responses
Community Policing
Community Policing
Community policing

Community Policing
Community policing - knowing officers in your district. Different definition from current application.
Community Policing
Community Policing
Community Policing
Community Policing
Complaint process needs to be more clear, transparent, accessible
conflict resolution with community members by Sergeants and higher level police
Cost of police presence during protests
CRB – seeks more legislative authority
CRB needs greater authority and transparency
Crime control
Crime is increasing
De-escalation training for officers
Diversion programs for youth away from criminal justice system
Diversity Recruitment
Diversity Training
Diversity Training
Diversity Training and Recruitment
Diversity Trainings
Education requirements: college degree for police?
Fair test
Fighting Poverty
Filing a complaint
Filing a Complaint
Filing a Complaint
Filing a Complaint (in B'vile and Liverpool)
Filing a Complaint
Follow Police Progress
Forums – needs officials to respond
Good models for suburban policing are Manlius, Camillus, Baldwinsville, Dewitt
Gun reduction
Hiring officers with a diversity mindset.
Housing
How do citizens get back confiscated property
Identifying officers – black tape over badges?
Increase number of police in Brewerton.
Increase Policing
Internal affairs – dismisses complaints by people of color
Interpreter access – language and ASL
Invite more pastors and community leaders to participate in forums
Knowing someone high up in police ends low-level encounters
Lack of communication

Lack of police follow up / explanation of process
Lack of trust
Lack of trust
Language Barriers
Liverpool, Clay, Cicero - areas where black and brown people are profiled
Mental Health
Mental Health Resources
Mental Health response as alternative to policing
Mental health response as alternative to policing.
Mental Health Response Team
Mental Health Response Team
Mental Health Response Team
Mental Health Response Team
Mental Health Services in the Community
Mental health support and better interactions
More mental health supports in school
Most officers act professionally
New officers – academy training and field training do not align
Onondaga Nation – racism and sovereignty
Onondaga Nation – U.N. Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) principles applied
Open accountability of police to restore trust
People know the Officers
Perception that more stops increases municipalities budgets.
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police accountability
Police accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police accountability lacking
Police accountability needs to be more severe
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability

Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability
Police Accountability lacking
Police Accountability/Responsibility: Liverpool
Police and mental health – CIT teams to respond, not police
Police and refugees
Police Behavior with Children
Police Behavior
Police brutality
Police brutality
Police brutality
Police brutality
Police brutality
Police brutality
Police brutality and investigation
Police Demeanor
Police demeanor – supervisor training
Police demeanor - why they do what they do
Police demeanor disrespectful/demeaning to public
Police Discipline
Police discipline
Police Discipline
Police facing low consequences
Police Mental Health
Police officer residence isn't in the city
Police recruiting – people of color
Police response to peaceful protests too aggressive
Police Response
Police should not be in schools
Police stops for no reason
Police treatment of children
Police violence contributes to increases in anxiety and stress.
Police-Community relationship building
Police-community Relationship building
Police-community Relationship with people of color
Poor officer demeanor
Poor police demeanor
Poor police demeanor
Positive interaction with SPD and Trooper in terms of response and deameanor
Poverty and Housing
Providing language / ASL translation in the field
Public Safety

Publish SPD trainings and costs
Racial bias and being stopped
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling
Racial Profiling: Liverpool
Recruitment
Recruitment of minorities
Recruitment strategies (specifically for young people from SCSD)
Reduce SPD budget by half and reallocate to community initiatives
reform use of force
Resources
Resources
Right to know – let people know name and badge number
Right to Know act implementation status (now law to identify crime and officer, not just left to training)
Safety for refugees
Safety of the citizens filling complaints
Search without Warrant
Searching Police records
Seeking full roll out of Right to Know act
Seeking Support
Sheriff Reform
Slow Response
SPD recruitment process is not as organized as State Troopers
Spreading Awareness of Citizens' Rights
Supervising the Police
Supervisor training for officer demeanor
Supervisors holding officers accountable for demeanor
Systemic Change/ Budget
systemic racism is a public health threat
Targeting citizens
Timing
Town of Clay police
Unaddressed police complaints
Youth engagement
Youth Engagement

