

Race and Identity-Based Data Collection Community Town Halls

Facilitator's Report

Background

On June 15 2022, the Toronto Police Service (TPS) publicly released its report on the findings of race and identity-based data collected in 2020, which documented the impact of police officers' perceptions of an individual's race in reportable use-of-force and strip searches. Unfortunately, the report's data revealed that there was clear evidence of asymmetrical distribution of the use of force across racial groups.

The report found that there were differences by race in use of force incidents, with distinct patterns for different race groups. For example:

- People who were perceived to be Black or Middle Eastern were over-represented in enforcement actions, relative to their presence in Toronto, and over-represented in use of force incidents once they interacted with police. This pattern may be characterized as high contact, high conflict.
- People who were perceived to be Indigenous were over-represented in interactions with police, but were under-represented in use of force incidents. This pattern can be described as high contact, low conflict.
- People who were perceived to be East Asian, Southeast Asian, or Latino were under-represented in police contact but over-represented in use of force. This is a low contact, high conflict pattern.
- People who were perceived to be White were both under-represented in police contact and in use of force following a low contact, low conflict pattern.

Please see the detailed reports and videos that are publicly available [here](#).

In response, TPS leadership launched a tour of six town halls to review the findings directly with community leaders and residents in an effort to rebuild trust as well as to promote healing and the work TPS has done since the report to reduce inequities. Those six town halls on Race and Identity-Based Data Collection (RBDC) Strategy were held throughout the City of Toronto from October 27, 2022 to March 8, 2023. Town halls were held in Rexdale, Malvern, Jane & Finch, Scarborough, and Lawrence Heights—all areas with diverse populations associated with having higher than average concentrations of Black Canadians.

TPS Presentations

To begin with, each town hall presented a land acknowledgement to honour our Indigenous heritage as well as our diverse histories that include horrors of slavery. After the land acknowledgement, community partners who helped with local outreach and networking introduced themselves and their organizations' missions. The community partners' presentation then led into TPS' presentation. Deputy Chief Colin Stairs launched each TPS presentation by first acknowledging that the report findings are troubling and point to the need for greater equity in the delivery of police services and commitment to strive towards equity.

Afterward, a RBDC team member from the Equity, Inclusion & Human Rights Unit presented the key findings of the report published in June 2022. All town halls had large billboard-like posters that showcased the pathways for a use of force and strip search for the public to understand the dynamics of these interactions as well as infographics with key statistics that highlighted the various points of disproportionalities and inequities. In addition, sworn TPS leaders from the divisions where the town halls took place, together with Neighbourhood Community Officers (NCOs), were present to hear the concerns raised by community members, respond to questions, and provide information about the operational aspects of policing.

The presentations also spoke to the fact that the RBDC Strategy is rolling out in phases, and that the findings being presented currently pertain to Phase 1 of the strategy. Therefore, more insights will be gained in the upcoming phases and the process will be informed by lessons learned on an ongoing basis. Yet, for the sake of equity, the TPS will need to be responsive to the data. And, indeed, as the early data points to biases in policing, the TPS has begun to enact policies that have reduced inequalities in strip searches. This ought to be applauded.

As more data is collected and released, I am particularly interested in learning more about how each pipeline that leads to police interactions with civilians contributes to and/or leads to the Use of Force. For example, what are the top pipelines that we ought to address to vastly improve equity?

Community Feedback

Once the TPS initial presentations were concluded, the community participants had the opportunity to share their concerns, feelings, and questions regarding race-based data collection, the report's findings and its 38 actionable recommendations, as well as offer feedback on policing in general. Community feedback and responses were made both in person and online as each town hall was streamed live for those who could not make it in person, making the engagement highly accessible.

My role as the facilitator was to ensure that community members were heard. I often re-asked and rephrased questions to ensure full understanding of the questions and their context. I was consistently searching for connectivity gaps to then close them. The needed conversations tended to be intense with a multitude of questions that made it necessary to omit the originally planned break-out sessions, that were intended to provide TPS leadership and staff the opportunity to

work more closely with community groups and residents to collaboratively explore ideas and establish greater understanding. I believe this opportunity is still needed.

In fact, it would be great if future town halls happened after a few ‘readiness’ sessions that deep dived into the report allowing TPS staff and residents to explore the complexities of the report and future reports like it—together. Such “deepened” engagement could allow community leaders to work with TPS leadership and independent subject matter experts and then communicate the information thoroughly throughout their networks. Such an inclusive data sharing approach would not only strengthen the TPS-community partnerships within the communities, but it would also allow community participants to have adequate time to digest the RBDC information in interactive and responsive settings. In turn, such engagements would allow TPS leadership along with community members to begin co-designing initiatives and solutions—including the establishment of key performance indicators to guide the development of TPS' data collection and analysis processes.

With that being said, the communities’ comments and feedback were nonetheless dynamic. They generally fell within one of three main themes:

- The need for more police accountability
- The need for better ongoing training of officers, and
- The need to reduce the turnovers among NCOs.

At the Jamaican Canadian Association, residents particularly lamented the fact that there were too many turnovers among their NCOs. They pointed out that such staffing turnovers undermined the trust building process as the community trust earned by established police officers was disrupted when they left and were replaced by new officers. This matter was extremely important to the residents as the work of a good NCO is to know them, their children, their fears, and hopes. The familiarity of the NCO creates trust that then offers a sense of security and safety. The residents wanted their NCOs and wanted them to stay longer to deepen those bonds. It was clear to see that the NCOs have created an incredible amount of social capital for the TPS and communities they serve.

Regarding the data collection process specifically, one Albion resident that shared her experience communicating with a dispatcher alluded to a series of important questions. What constitutes data? Who gets to decide? And, how is data converted into meaning throughout the entire process of policing? All pointed questions. Questions that ought to be fully examined as the methodology governing the collection of race-based data itself matures.

Recommendations

Reflecting on my experiences as the facilitator, I wish to offer a few recommendations on developing and delivering future town hall to promote the growth of stronger community relationships:

1. Create Readiness Engagements To Address Complex Topic

Although I have mentioned this point earlier—allow me to stress it again, the community engagement should be done in stages to allow community leaders to absorb the complexities of the subject matter, its impacts as well as its implications. This deepened knowledge can then be shared with their communities and networks. The settings need to be more relaxed and intimate, more like a study group with open, two-way responsive dialogues allowing the sharing process to be dynamic, layered, and multi-directional.

This more intimate engagement style should include TPS’ internal subject matter experts as well as external ones. This kind of engagement will allow community leadership to be informed enough to offer high-quality and focused input. In addition, those community leaders will have the insights needed to inform their networks and “ready” them to explore the subject within a larger public setting such as a town hall.

By using such a staged approach, TPS could establish more points where it engages and collaborates with community leadership to capture high-quality feedback. Therefore, TPS could be accessing both the needed quantity and quality of community insights to enrich and inform its ongoing development of the RBDC Strategy and corresponding policies that aim to be both effective and equitable. In addition, adapting such an engagement strategy would enable TPS to deepen its relationship with community partners.

2. Adapt Co-design Methodologies

Co-design is an effective way to deliver an engagement strategy that would enable TPS to deepen its relationship with community partners. Co-design is a strategic approach that is highly inclusive and enables collecting, managing, and observing an extensive amount of perspectives and insights from a wide range of stakeholders who represent the interests and needs of those impacted by a given policy, activity or initiative. Therefore, co-design would allow TPS to work effectively along vertical and horizontal lines, to drastically reduce the barriers that hierarchies, and siloing create to achieve a 360-degree lens on race-based data collection.

Simply put, co-design is an inclusive problem-solving tool. For this reason, fully incorporating co-design methodologies would strengthen TPS’s engagements allowing them to acquire excellent community intelligence and insights to formulate policies and initiatives that inherently contain community buy-in. For this reason, TPS town halls would greatly benefit from co-design methodologies, as they would ensure that the next series of town halls would be infused with a high degree of community design inputs, support and solutions.

The town halls would have greater focus on the primary subject matter, wider community collaboration and reach. In the end, TPS town halls will offer both the community and the organization greater impact and return on engagements.

3. Diversify The Outreach Process To Diversify The Audience

Given the reality of the data, it is important to continue to have targeted and intentional outreach campaigns to engage Black communities. At the same time, race-based data is relevant to all communities, it ultimately impacts all communities, and all communities therefore ought to be concerned about it.

I believe then that the TPS engagement relating to its RBDC Strategy should at least reflect the racial communities measured in its report: Middle Eastern, Latino, Indigenous, East Asian, South Asian, White, and Black communities. To achieve greater diversity and inclusion, TPS will need to ensure that more stakeholders are engaged from across the varying racial groups that reside in diverse neighbourhoods and communities across Toronto. Again, the deeper and more extensive the engagement gets, the more diverse insights and perspectives it can and will offer. Obtaining diverse and high-quality insights will enable TPS to form effective policies while establishing solid community partnerships.

In closing, I wish to express my sincere hope that TPS leadership and communities continue to collaborate and work together to close the equity gaps that the RBDC report has revealed. It has been an honour to have facilitated these town halls. It was fascinating to learn about the complexities of race-based data collection within policing and to have met the incredible talents behind the report. While saddened by the reality of the data findings, I enjoyed bearing witness to the people who are passionate about building better relationships between TPS and the communities it serves.

I thank all of you who participated in the series of town halls—sharing your time, your insights and your hope for equity.

Our work continues.

Sincerely,



Claudia McKoy

Principal, [UpSurgence](#).



UpSurgence.