

Opinion

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How to lend your voice to the conversation on community policing

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Seattle police stage vehicles in a parking lot across from Occidental Square during a rally for Indigenous peoples rights on Jan. 23, 2021. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

By [Jacqueline B. Helfgott](#) and [Brandon N. Bledsoe](#)

Special to The Times

In May 2022, the Seattle Police Department launched the “[Before the Badge](#)” (BTB) training program. Pioneered by Police Chief Adrian Diaz,

the program engages new Seattle Police recruits in 45-days of training on interpersonal relationships and wellness before entering the Washington State Basic Law Enforcement Academy.

The goal of the training is to immerse new recruits in community-based experiences that will enable them to build relationships with those who live and/or work in Seattle before entering their 720-hour academy training. The Before the Badge training program is grounded in relational policing that relies on community partnership, dialogue and collaborative engagement. The training components include community dialogues with geographical and identity-based groups, wellness and exploration of policing's racist history.

SPD's [Micro-Community Policing Plans](#), now in its eighth year, is one part of the Before the Badge training. Over the last two years, as part of the Micro-Community Policing Plans, we have held more than 30 community-police dialogues that brought together community members and police personnel through a restorative justice framework to discuss results of the [Seattle Public Safety Survey](#) and how community members and police can work together to increase public safety and security in Seattle. These conversations included community members from all Seattle precincts and 58 neighborhoods and a demographically and experientially diverse group of civilian and sworn police personnel from recruits to command staff.

In the fall, the Micro-Community Policing Plans launched [a new series](#) of community-police dialogues focused on the Before the Badge recruits as one component of the Before the Badge training to engage new recruits with community members at the precinct and neighborhood levels and to help educate recruits on neighborhood-based community public safety and security concerns. The dialogues offer opportunity for [community members and recruits to work together in creative and concrete ways](#) to increase public safety and improve neighborhood quality of life, recognizing the shared humanity of the recruits and the community members they will serve. The community-

police dialogues help train recruits for their roles as police officers through shared community culture that builds relationships that will start early and run deep.

Recruits joining the Seattle Police Department are entering an entirely new world of policing. Who are the individuals who decided to join the Seattle Police Department at a time in history when policing as a career is seen as **largely undesirable**? What do these newly hired recruits need to know about Seattle and its neighborhoods? How can recruits work together with community members to improve public safety at a time of historically low police staffing levels?

These and other questions run through the dialogues with the Before the Badge recruits. Prominent themes in the conversations include how the recruits will respond to crime while acknowledging historical police practices that have harmed marginalized populations and how they will change police culture. Discussions are framed by results of the Seattle Public Safety Survey findings to highlight specific neighborhood public safety concerns and quality of life. Community members are invited to share the most important thing they would like new recruits to know about their neighborhoods, and recruits are invited to share their backgrounds, why they joined the Seattle Police Department and what they will offer the community.

The conversations enable new recruits and community members to develop relationships early in the training process to lay the groundwork for community members and future police officers to work together to restore community trust in police. When community members are able to engage with police recruits before rather than after they enter police culture, and to develop and sustain ongoing and longstanding relationships from a perspective of understanding rather than opposition, there is hope that one recruit and one community member at a time, the barriers, issues, and actions that separate and maintain the distrust between community and the police will slowly break down as a new culture of police rises up.

The Seattle Public Safety Survey will be administered Oct. 15 through Nov. 30 in 11 languages. To participate in the SPD's Micro-Community Policing Plans, Before the Badge community-police dialogues and the survey, go online: publicsafetysurvey.org.

For those unable to take the survey online, paper surveys are available upon request by email: publicsafetysurvey@seattleu.edu.

Early interaction between community and police recruits can help new Seattle police recruits and community members learn and understand together that police culture is

community culture. This early lesson and development of relationships has the potential to create long-term change in police and community culture that will run deep.

***Jacqueline B. Helfgott** is professor of Criminal Justice and director of the Crime & Justice Research at the Seattle University Department of the Criminal Justice. She has collaborated with the Seattle Police Department on research initiatives for nearly three decades.*

***Brandon N. Bledsoe** is a student in Seattle University's Master of Arts in Criminal Justice program and is serving as the South and Southwest precinct research analyst for the Seattle Police Department's Micro-Community Policing-Plans.*

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