



## INDEPENDENT OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT REVIEW AND OUTREACH (IOLERO)

County of Sonoma

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Dear Sonoma County Community:

A few years ago, my predecessor here at IOLERO, Karlene Navarro, and then-Assistant Sheriff Jim Naugle worked together to create a survey about Community Oriented Policing. Community Oriented Policing can mean a number of different things to law enforcement, and others to community. Here, Director Navarro and Assistant Sheriff Naugle specifically sought to assess how well community and sheriff's deputies perceived community policing, how well they were communicating with each other, and how we could identify successes and room for growth in that relationship. They sought the assistance of Sonoma State University in this project. Professor Emily Asencio offered to bring her expertise in community survey work to complete a thorough study. Attached to this cover letter is the result of that work: the Community Oriented Policing Project.

You'll see in the attached report from Professor Asencio a thorough description of how the survey was completed, who was surveyed, and what patterns and trends appear from the survey results. Here at IOLERO, we would flag a few specific trends that caught our eyes. Perhaps others stand out to you.

First, there was strong agreement about those surveyed that building trust between deputies and community was essential, and that community engagement is an important tool in creating that trust. Specifically, community noted that speaking calmly, listening actively, using names, and neutral body language were all effective tools and were often used by deputies. Community generally reported good relationships with deputies in the field.

Second, we noted some portions of the Sonoma County community had different assessments of these issues than the community as a whole. For example, whether individuals felt fairly treated by deputies in their interactions was roughly split between positive and negative experiences. Spanish speakers reporting seeing far fewer instances of deputies using that speaking calmly, listening actively, using names, and neutral body

language. That said, Spanish speakers also assigned lower importance to community-oriented policing practices on the whole than did English speakers.

Likewise, non-white respondents also reported encountering deputies outside of calls for service less often than white respondents did. They also reported a slightly lower satisfaction with the communications they did have with deputies, which might be partly due to also being more likely to encounter deputies during calls for service. A call for service is usually precipitated by a stressful or unfortunate event, sometimes placing all involved more on edge than in community outreach events. Presumably having positive communications are more difficult in a stressful situation of that sort.

Geographic differences also stood out to us. For example, residents in Sonoma Valley and West County were much more likely to report that community-oriented policing practices were important to them than residents in other parts of the county. Given that these parts of the county rely more heavily on the Sheriff's Office for patrol functions, like responses to 911 calls, this emphasis on community-oriented policing is understandable. West County residents were also much more likely to report seeing deputies use strong engagement tools like speaking calmly, listening actively, using names, and neutral body language. Sonoma Valley residents were much more likely to report that deputies were responsive to community concerns, but West County residents had a mixed response on this issue.

Finally, while participation rates among deputies were low, we were glad to see that the vast majority of those who did respond noted that community engagement was very important. On the other hand, there seemed to be mixed responses to whether the language used to communicate with community members was important. This suggests a source of disconnection with Spanish speakers, who reported slightly less satisfaction with their contacts with deputies. SCSO emphasis on language skills and access might help with this issue.

Based on these trends, we would suggest four things to the Sheriff's Office and the community:

1. Existing efforts by the Sheriff's Office to show up at community events, to reach out to community through social media and Town Halls, and to encourage deputies to engage community in the field in ways other than just responding to calls for service appear to have been very successful at building a positive relationship with community members. These efforts are worth the time, money, and effort to continue.
2. Spanish speakers on the whole are less confident about their relationship with the Sheriff's Office. Using the existing engagement strategies, but targeting more of them to Spanish speakers, might help. In particular, encouraging deputies to

- interact in Spanish more in one-on-one interactions and community events would likely help. Investments in recruiting Spanish speakers and/or teaching Spanish language skills would also help, as would reinforcing with deputies that connecting in Spanish is a priority. The Sheriff's Office has invested in all these strategies to some extent; more emphasis here may be needed.
3. As a general rule, non-white residents express slightly less positive interactions with deputies. This is a challenge in many law enforcement agencies, especially given the historical tensions between law enforcement and communities of color throughout our country. Taking advantage of some [Northern California experts](#) on this issue could be helpful. The [Oakland Police Department and Dr. Jennifer Eberhard of Stanford](#) conducted an outstanding study of communication styles between police officers and communities of color shown in body worn camera footage a few years ago. That work led to [specific training for officers on how to improve word choice, tone, and listening skills that both police and community later reported were greatly appreciated](#). We would recommend looking into that work for possible training for deputies.
  4. Finally, among the communities in which the Sheriff's Office is the primary provider of patrol services, West County residents seem to have a lower level of confidence that the Sheriff's Office is responsive to community concerns than residents of the Sonoma Valley. But West County residents do have a high level of confidence in their interactions with individual deputies. If outreach events in Sonoma Valley are different than those in West County, perhaps some of the Sonoma Valley tools might help in West County.

As you review this report, we would be interested in hearing what trends stand out to you.

Both Director Navarro and Assistant Sheriff Naugle have since moved on to other positions. But we appreciate the vision they brought to this project. We hope you do, too.



John Alden  
IOLERO Director

