



El Paso County Sheriff's Office



March 5, 2021

To: Sheriff's Office Executive Staff

From: Bureau Chief Clif Northam

Re: Community Conversations Session #2, February 23, 2021

On Tuesday evening, February 23, 2021, from 6:00pm until 8:00 pm the second Sheriff's Office Community Conversations (Project) session was held. This session was also a virtual session via Zoom. Of the twenty-one community members who sent RSVP notices to join the session, there were sixteen community members in attendance. In addition to three of our Planning Team members, there were and six Sheriff's Office volunteers participating in the breakout room conversations.

The EPSO Planning team members joined with Sheriff's Office Command Staff, the community members and the EPSO volunteers for introductions at 6:00pm.

At the end of the introductions, we broke the group up into three separate virtual breakout rooms. As in the previous Session, each breakout room had one facilitator assigned to move the conversations forward and ensure everyone had an equal opportunity to express their views and ask questions. The facilitators were chosen based on their leadership and facilitation skills and selected by a consultant.

Each group was given approximately an hour and a half for discussion. The same prompts were used as previously reported from the first Community Conversations session. They were:

Prompt 1: (General Perceptions of Law Enforcement):

- Specific questions removed

Prompt 2: (Community Safety):

- Specific questions removed

Prompt 3: (Community Reflection):

- Specific questions removed



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Prompt 4: (Trust):

- Specific questions removed

The facilitators are instructed to use the prompts to guide the meeting if the community members are hesitant to participate or don't have specific topics they wish to address. We expect that some breakout rooms will get through the prompt questions and some will not, depending on what the community members wish to discuss and that is perfectly acceptable. Our goal is to hear from the public about their concerns first.

The facilitator notes will be attached along with this document so they can be read in their entirety. I will highlight some of the comments from each group below.

Breakout Group #1:

1. There was a high level of interest from the community members in what the Community Conversations Project was about.
2. Most had never had a negative experience with the Sheriff's Office.
3. Each of the participants indicated they had a good level of trust towards the Office.
4. There were concerns brought up about the growth in El Paso County and whether EPSO was sufficiently staffed to handle the problems that come with the growth, such as increased gang activity.
5. The participants were very positive about the BHCON Mental Health Program we have at the Office and thought we should try to expand it if possible.
6. There was a call for greater citizen volunteerism with the Office.

Breakout Group #2:

1. The participants were mostly favorable of the Sheriff's Office, but a few had personal concerns they wanted to discuss.
2. There should be greater accountability of law enforcement. Deputies and Officers should not receive preferential treatment when they violate laws.
3. We should consider conducting the Community Conversations sessions on a weekend day to possibly enable greater diversity of participants.

4. EPSO deputies need more and better communication skills training for dealing with the public.
5. We need to do more outreach to the minority communities.

Breakout Group #3:

1. Members of this group were very supportive of law enforcement in general and particularly of our Office.
2. Participants were happy to see EPSO embracing social issues
3. There are concerns, however in the community about the Office. One example given was that of several negative social media posts by someone discussing the Community Conversations project.
4. There were questions from the attendees about ways to develop greater trust. It was suggested we need more positive interaction with community members and opportunities to truly engage on a deeper level, understanding the restrictions COVID-19 placed on us.

Lessons Learned:

- ❖ We see a need to work harder to achieve more diversity among participants. This session had a good mix of male and female community members. From personal observation only, one participant appeared Hispanic, one African American, the rest appeared White.
- ❖ Several of the participants signed on to talk about their specific issues and were not interested in our prompt questions. For the most part our facilitators recognized this and allowed those citizens to voice their concerns. The EPSO volunteers in that breakout room, were able to provide the perspective of a law enforcement official but did not try to answer all their questions.
- ❖ For those participants who emailed us with their RSVP and suggestions for what they wanted to talk about, we should pass that information on to the facilitators and possibly to the EPSO volunteers depending on the subject and whether or not the volunteer can adequately address the concerns.
- ❖ One EPSO volunteer asked if we could better communicate with the citizen participants that we are listening and learning and building upon each Session to gain greater trust and understanding with the Community.

Action Steps:

We have completed the creation of the Community Conversations page on the Sheriff's Office external website and that will be live to the public the week of March 8, 2021.

The consultant will hold a training session with the facilitators prior to each session to prepare them for the questions and concerns from community members who RSVP and include specific topics they wish to discuss.

An email message was sent out to all of the EPSO volunteers who participated in this session asking for their input regarding how they felt the process went in their respective breakout rooms and any other comments pro or con regarding the Community Conversations Project. We will continue to ask volunteers to send us feedback because we are sincerely interested in the opinions of Office members as well as those of the community members. We will stress this point of view prior to each future session.

After the first session we reached out to citizens who attended to address any concerns or attempt to answer any questions not fully addressed during the breakout discussions. We will continue to do this after each session. If feasible, we will attempt to address community member's general concerns through the Sheriff's Office website and/or other social media platforms.

The consultant will be sending out an email, prior to the March session, to all Planning Team members requesting they take an even more active role in reaching out to their contacts to increase the diversity of participants who respond to our requests to attend the Sessions.

We will contact the El Paso Count Public Information Office to request they also publicize our Community Conversations Project and session information each month, to reach even more of our citizens.

The next Community Conversations Session (#3) is scheduled for Wednesday, March 24, 2021, beginning at 6:00pm. The next Planning Team meeting will be March 15, 2021, at 10:00 am. The planning team will meet again on Monday, March 29, 2021 to debrief the previous week's session. A notice will go out to all Planning Team members

that meetings will be only twice a month, until further notice. Chris Cipoletti will send out the meeting invites in the future with the Zoom link to log on.

CHN/cn