

Recommendation #X:

In devising a strategic plan, MPD should consider the findings and recommendation in this report to the degree they suggest paths toward further improvement and seek input and assistance in its development from all MPD employees, city stakeholders, and the Madison community. [OIR Report #1]

Discussion: MPD fully agrees with this recommendation, noting that it “has previously engaged in strategic planning processes, and found each of them to be extremely beneficial in guiding the department. When the OIR Group started its work, the department was in the early stages of a formal strategic planning process (City Purchasing had already received several responses to an RFP). At the request of several Common Council members, that effort was suspended pending completion of the OIR project.” As the MPD re-engages this process, it plans to “include extensive involvement and input from employees and the community,” as it has in the past, as well as now the “information contained in the OIR report.” OIR notes: “Consistent with a key recommendation of President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, MPD personnel assigned to the project should conduct extensive and varied outreach. The goal is to ensure that all Madisonians are able to readily contribute their perspective on what they hope the Madison Police Department will look like in future years, and can assist in developing aspirational goals. In short, because MPD belongs to all of its communities, it is critical for the Department to seek the input of all as it formalizes a vision for the future.”

Recommendation #X:

MPD should commit to a re-energized Racial Disparity Impact Committee and should provide both incentives for participation and continued organizational support for its efforts and specific initiatives. [OIR Report #3]

Discussion: MPD informs the Committee that it “is committed to the goals of the Racial Disparity Impact Committee [RDIC],” and is in the process of reorganizing the group to make it more effective. The Department’s efforts at creative engagement with issues of inequity, including the RDIC’s effective collaboration with partners in the justice system and the local community, can be challenging to sustain, dependent as they are on personal initiative and volunteerism, and given that the impacts can be hard to measure. Some of the individual members of the group are unclear about the program’s future and at the time of OIR review it was on a hiatus of sorts, in recognition of some lost momentum, while the Department reassesses its structure. We would like to see the Department continue to harness the creativity, sensitivity, and enthusiasm that the RDIC has brought to this important subject.

Recommendation #X:

Through resources and other forms of messaging, MPD management should enhance its structural and philosophical commitment to the Judgment Under the Radar program as a means of reinforcing its important work. [OIR Report #4]

Discussion: MPD administrators, and groups of officers within the MPD, have long recognized that the topic of bias is a fraught but critical one for peace officers that speaks to the very intentions and culpability of the police themselves. Studies in unconscious, unintentional, or “implicit” bias seek to promote first a recognition and acknowledgement of the reality and implications of bias. Its remedies remain central to the evolving state of police-community relations. MPD, while a healthy and progressive agency in numerous ways, is not immune from pitfalls of bias. OIR notes that, beginning nearly ten years ago, “a cadre of officers – several of whom had personal insight into issues of societal bias – worked to create a training program that they could bring to their colleagues.” According to OIR, “most prominently, the result has been the ‘Judgment Under the Radar’ series of related presentations that date back to 2011 and continue being developed today,” with the most recent presentation in 2015. This grassroots, volunteer effort by officers, however, is perhaps unequal to the subject’s importance and complexity. While the MPD informed the Committee that “MPD leadership has been strongly supportive of the ‘Judgment Under the Radar’ effort,” there is room for more structural support from the Department and more ways to promote involvement and engagement among officers. We encourage MPD to find concrete ways to bolster the Judgment Under the Radar program and to maximize its internal and external impacts.

Recommendation #X:

Should future presentations by Judgment Under the Radar (or any other group) touching on bias be met with strongly negative reactions, MPD leadership should assess the underpinnings of the behavior. [OIR Report #5]

Discussion: MPD concurs with this recommendation, noting that it “routinely seeks input/feedback on all training that employees attend, both internal and external. Adjustments in training occur as a result.” This can be challenging to implement at full depth. OIR notes that “we heard repeated references to the backlash against the 2015 training block that Judgment Under the Radar offered the Department. Not only did the subject matter seem to generate significant disagreement, but the reactions of fellow officers, and the harshness of the subsequent critiques, made a strong and disappointing impression on team members and their supporters.” MPD, however, suggests that it believes a negative response that the 2015 Judgment Under the Radar training received was directed more to the teaching style of the program than “to the overall principle of the training.” The Committee urges the MPD to fully explore any negative responses to all bias-related training to determine and address its underpinnings, to ensure that it does not represent resistance to de-biasing efforts, and where necessary, to take remedial action.

Recommendation #X:

The City should move apace to providing a translation function for its website so that MPD’s information (as well as other City information) can be more facilely accessed and used by persons with limited English proficiency. [OIR Report #6]

Discussion: MPD concurs with this recommendation, asserting that it “strongly supports full accessibility to all of MPD’s services, including the MPD website.” MPD’s Community Outreach and Resource Education (CORE) Team has sought to increase accessibility and has highlighted the importance of MPD website translation. The Common Council passed a 2016 resolution barring automated translation, and thus such a mechanism cannot be used, but plans for website translation are included in the Madison’s Department of Civil Rights draft Language Access Plan. Meanwhile, the Department is moving forward with identifying critical documents for translation, translating them, and posting them on the MPD website. The Committee believes that attention to this task remains important, given that effective public communication needs to be a priority, and this includes relationship-building and improved connections with all segments of the Madison population.