

Community Safety Internship Program Evaluation: Summer 2017 Pilot Study Report Summary

Executive Summary

Stanford SPARQ: Social Psychological Answers to Real-world Questions (SPARQ) and the San Francisco Human Rights Commission (HRC) partnered during the summer of 2017 to conduct a pilot study evaluating the Community Safety Initiative's (CSI) summer internship program. The CSI program is an eight-week career exploration and leadership development opportunity for youth from San Francisco's low-income neighborhoods. As part of the program, students develop a summer project with community partners to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their community.

The study evaluated the CSI program's effectiveness at meeting its primary goals: 1) supporting youth's academic and community engagement and empowerment; 2) developing students' 21st century learning skills for the workplace; 3) improving youth's perceptions of the police and their role in the community; and 4) fostering students' interest in law enforcement and public safety careers. Since police-community tensions are high around the U.S., particularly between police and communities of color, we compared the experience of students who spent the summer learning about law enforcement to that of students who participated in other types of internships (e.g., in public service or technology).

To evaluate the program, SPARQ designed a survey that was administered to students at both the beginning and the end of the summer. Survey measures assessed students' program experience, academic and community engagement and empowerment, 21st century skills, perceptions of and attitudes about the police and police-community relations, and interest in law enforcement and public safety careers. SPARQ also conducted site visits and observations of the program.

Our pilot study evaluation results suggest that youth benefitted from the CSI program personally, socially, and academically, and that the program helped prepare them for future success in college and career. Their overall program experience was positive and meaningful, especially because it provided them with new opportunities to learn and exposed them to novel experiences. While youth certainly expressed concerns about law enforcement and its relationship with the community, our results also suggest there is room for this relationship to grow and improve. Students who worked with law enforcement over the summer, in particular, had more positive attitudes about the police, felt more hopeful about the future, and were more empowered to work to foster better police-community relations, even within the current climate of heightened tension between police and communities of color around the country.

Conclusions & Preliminary Recommendations

The CSI summer program is making a difference in the lives of youth of color in San Francisco. Taken together, results from our pilot study suggest that the CSI program has been quite successful in meeting at least three of its primary program goals: 1) supporting youth's academic and community engagement and empowerment; 2) developing students' 21st century learning skills for the workplace; and 3) improving youth's perceptions of the police and their role in the community. There is still some work to be done to advance the fourth program goal, fostering students' interest in law enforcement and public

safety careers, but there is room to improve. Given the current social and political climate around policing, this is understandably a challenging task—especially among youth of color whose communities have a historically troubled relationship with law enforcement.

Interestingly, our findings revealed that students in the other CSI groups also demonstrated some improved or changed attitudes toward law enforcement at the end of the program, even though they did not have the opportunity to engage with officers and policing issues at the same level as students in the SFPD group. These findings suggest that hearing the SFPD group’s final presentations and interacting with students from that group throughout the summer may have had an impact on other students in the program. This experience could be something to leverage in future iterations of the program or even incorporate more intentionally into the SFPD group’s project work.

When considering what else could be done to improve the relationship between police and the community in San Francisco, we turned to the students. When asked if they could do one thing to improve police-community relations, students overwhelmingly talked about bringing the two sides together for more dialogue, social interaction, and other opportunities to build connection, empathy, and understanding. They also mentioned improving policing practices and decreasing violence.

Along these lines, we also asked students to tell us what they would recommend if they could ask the Chief of the SFPD to do one thing to improve police-community relations. Students most frequent responses included improving policing practices, treating people better and more respectfully, and engaging in more community outreach.

Student recommendations also align with what we heard from SFPD officers who worked with the youth. While they believed that the CSI program was highly effective and a positive experience for the students as well as themselves, they expressed interest in having more personal interactions with students, possibly out of uniform. One officer even talked about, given the time and resources, how she would ideally like to hold a retreat where youth and police officers could really have the chance to get to know each other, discuss the issues, and build deeper relationships over the course of a day or two. Given officers’ interest, the HRC could consider adding something like a facilitated intergroup dialogue experience into the program and evaluating its impact on both police officers and students. This work could also build on the Youth Forums program that the HRC sponsors, designed to provide a space for dialogue between youth, the community, and the police in San Francisco.

Study Partners

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