

Event Report

Community Summit Meeting 2020

Advocacy and Awareness Group: Johnson County

14th December, 2020

AAGJC



Introduction

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2. Organizations in Attendance
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Pre-Summit Planning

The Advocacy and Awareness Group: Johnson County (AAGJC) began planning in the Fall of 2020 to host a virtual Community Summit Event. The event organizers proposed to gather a group of active community organizations serving the Overland Park/Johnson County area, with plans to address the following goals:

- Identify clear action items based on the summit discussions and areas of alignment about topics related (but not limited to) social justice, racial inequality, housing, policy and policing in our community
- Develop relationships across organizations to facilitate cooperation on an ongoing basis
- Understand the “ecosystem” of organizations doing similar/adjacent work with unique interests and tactics.

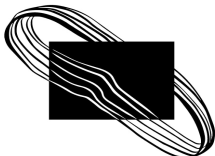
As planned, the first half of the summit would consist of discussions and planning among the community organizations only. During the last hour of the summit, members of the Overland Park City Council and Overland Park City Government would join the conversation for a “Call to Action” session focused on discussing outcomes from the day and creating an action plan for next steps.

Organizations in Attendance

El Centro



MORE²
METRO ORGANIZATION FOR RACIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY



THE MILLER DREAM
CREATING UNITY ONE COMMUNITY AT A TIME!



Saint Andrew
Christian Church



Safe and
Welcoming
Roeland
Park

Breakout Session: Identifying Priority Issues

Summary:


During group introductions and our opening large group discussion, we identified key issues in which we'll focus on immediately. We broke out into 3 smaller groups and each group joined where their work best aligned.

We started each group discussion with the following prompt questions:

1. What work is each represented organization doing?
2. What are the challenges/opportunities?
3. What's standing in the way?
4. What work is existing that we should take advantage of?
5. What is not being done yet that needs to be in order to be successful?

The 3 identified breakout topics/issues were:

1. Racial Bias and Systemic Racism in Policing in Overland Park
 - Key takeaways:
 - Recognition and acknowledgement that there is a problem.
 - Explore the question: "Who's the appropriate responder?" A generation ago, we recognized that EMTs were better responders to physical health emergencies than police officers who weren't medically trained. It seems worth exploring who the best responders to mental health emergencies.
 - There are co-responders but not enough co-responders to be available for all of the calls at all times of the day. More funding towards that is crucial."
 - Johnson County Mental Health does work with the different police departments to deploy social workers with officers when responding to possible mental health crises, but what if people don't speak English?
 - From what I see on cameras, most cities have implemented cameras in JoCo, but to a varying degree.
 - Police oversight - that includes training and mechanisms for accountability *without* the DA when that office is a hindrance to accountability
2. Lack of Representation of BIPOC in Public Offices
 - Key takeaways:
 - Recognize there is a problem.
 - There are some voter engagement studies that show pretty decisively that, although people will say "I don't participate because I feel like I don't know



enough...", but at the same time, efforts that have thoroughly educated on issues and structures have had almost zero impact on participation.

Relationship and trust building are essential, and what have been shown to move the needle for increasing engagement and building power.

- Mainstream's Voter to Voter for example focuses on white friend networks as far as I can tell. Yet is presented as the gold standard in voter mobilization in JoCo. What would it look like to shift operations like this to center people of color?
- Education must have accountability in order to work. Otherwise people will go through the motions in regard to diversity training but not change their behavior.
- We worked with Voter to Voter internally in El Centro, but it is certainly not tailored to the Latino community yet. Trust is a big part of voter engagement, but I think it's going to take each organization with the trust to have a community wide impact. It's how we support each other that is going to take it to the next level.

3. Transparency in Data / Information

- Key takeaways:

- As we talk about education with police, education needs to take place with all elected officials.
- Education as a pyramid: focusing not just on current events, but also on the true history of BIPOC in the US.
- Education - increased requirements for LEOs and Electeds
- Education - increased requirements for BIPOC education
- Continuing education and community education requirements
- Ensuring we craft spaces and systems that do more than just 'welcome' BIPOC, but that empower people

Call to Action Session

Individuals in Attendance & Organizations Represented

The following organizations participated in the Call to Action session, comprising the final hour of our time together. Representatives from the Shawnee Mission School District and Miller Dream were unable to stay through the Call to Action session.

Advocacy and Awareness Group of Johnson County: *Linnaia McKenzie, Aarion Rideaux, Claudia J. Dawson, Drew Szczesny, Grant T. Mayfield, Haile Sims, Kendra Brack. Whitney Duitsman, Kristy Wittman Howell*

El Centro: *Valeria Espadas*

More²: *Marcus Winn*

JoCo United: *Sheila Albers*

SURJ: *Justin Gust, Michael Rebne*

NAACP: *Destiny Costley, Jenelle Holmes*

Safe and Welcoming Roeland Park: *Grant T. Mayfield*


St. Andrew Christian Church: *Avis Smith, Chris Wilson, Mark Harmon*

Overland Park City Council: *Logan Heley, Paul Lyons, Holly Grummert*

Overland Park Police Department: *Police Chief Frank Donchez*

In response to a question from Paul Lyons, AAGJC representatives described how we convened the groups represented at the summit.

"We come together today as a *collective of organizations* to create a welcoming community that *reimagines*, rather than reforms, a Johnson County where all voices have a seat at the table. We must educate our communities about Johnson County's history of and current practices supporting white supremacy and racist power structures. We will go beneath the surface of the problem to dismantle racist systems by promoting equity and building power for all people." - Mission Statement



After a quick review of the unified mission statement we developed in the first part of the Summit, we discussed the three broad areas in which our groups identified a need for improvement during the morning session:

1. Policing
2. Underrepresentation of Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in positions of power
3. Transparency

As the group discussed the broad action areas as defined by attendees, conversation can be roughly categorized into three areas as brought up by the community groups present, and three areas noted by the city employees and elected representatives:

Community Group Points

Need for meaningful data collection and transparency regarding police interactions
Need for increased educational requirements for Law Enforcement Officers
Need for city and police department to acknowledge there is a lack of community trust

Elected / Employee Points

Need for increased diversity on public boards
Expansions in the role of public safety officers are “impossible and unfair”
Establishment of successful Victim Support Unit and victim advocate

Discussion around each of these points was broadly as follows below:

Data Collection and Transparency

The group highlighted a need both for two kinds of data collection. First, collection and sharing via a LEFTA (Law Enforcement Field Training Application) system. Second, the group discussed a need for community-based, participatory-style research involving focus groups and interviews that would highlight and humanize citizens’ voices and experiences beyond the raw data.

Increased Educational Requirements

Requiring new officers joining the OPPD to have an undergraduate credential prior to their employment would serve three purposes: it would yield officers more familiar with best practices in public safety and therefore more equipped to operate fairly and safely in our community; creating a force better-prepared calling on support from social workers, victims’ advocates, and other community supports; and it would contribute to further development of trust in the community.



Acknowledgement of a Lack of Community Trust

Foundational to all of the other points suggested and discussed is the need for a clearly-articulated acknowledgement of a problem. As discussed, such an acknowledgment could take two forms: one a narrower recognition by the OPPD that the Department understands there has historically been and is a continuing problem of racial and ethnic bias in Departmental operations; and two, a broader City resolution acknowledging the City's historical and continuing problems with systemic racism.

Need for increased diversity on public boards

Representatives from the City acknowledged the need for more racially and ethnically diverse citizens in positions of power and leadership on committees and councils in Overland Park. The group discussed several solutions to the problem, from making the application process simpler and more accessible via a web-based process, to expanding calls for participation and reaching out to groups like those present to help recruit engaged citizens more effectively.

Expansions in the role of public safety officers are “impossible and unfair”

While information about the history, current challenges, and culture of over-policing in communities of color is part of the police academy education, the role of public safety officers has changed considerably from one focused on keeping the peace and narrow legal enforcement to include community development and mental health concerns. Such expansions in the demands on LEOs have created a situation where officers are unable to fulfill any of their required roles as well as they would like.

Establishment of successful Victim Support Unit and victim advocate

One step toward addressing growing demands on the PD has been taken in the establishment of a victim support unit. Expansion of the unit is paramount, especially given concerns about domestic violence in our community, which is often “overlooked.”





Next Steps

(Actionable vs. Non-Actionable)

This summit was the beginning. It was a space to gather our collective ideas and experiences to formulate a vision for our future. Moving forward, we are looking to build our community connections allowing for more solidified paths to a more equitable Johnson County. Based on our evaluation of the summit narrative, as hosts, this is what AAGJC identified as actionable and non-actionable steps.

Actionable Steps:

- Organize additional summits with specific asks to help map an action plan
 - Provide details on policies that need to change
 - Identifying individuals in the groups and city to enact the plan
 - Dedicated organizers that can continually provide updates and attend meetings to help influence a change
 - A template to provide people to send to council members
- Produce historical documentation to affirm the communities dedication to racial equality
 - Present to city council officials and police departments to publically sign and agree to the acknowledgement
- Instate a data system (LEFTA) that will ensure transparency and standardization
- Notify the public on openings and the process for how to get involved in the process
 - Create an hour long class on how to be appointed, and expectations
- Request specific reports over demographics for citations and incarceration

Non-Actionable:

- Continue to capture ideas and initiatives
- Encourage the community to look into the work that is being produced by the awareness groups
- Educate ourselves on the work being done outside of our own organizations
- Get together with other organizations to discuss initiatives
- Go over existing policies that are outdated and in need of change and provide as discussion points for a larger audience