

# FOCUS GROUP PLAN

## WHAT & WHY

When building a comprehensive policing model, it is essential to include both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative research is based on the principles of representative sampling and statistical analysis. The qualitative research builds upon the quantitative. The quantitative data provides the initial structure, while the qualitative gives the descriptive information that completes the picture.

In developing the Police Strategic Growth Plan (PSGP), the results of the 2022 Community Survey provided the quantitative data on which to build the plan. The survey clearly demonstrated community support for the current policing style of TPD. The next phase of the process is to add the qualitative research.

The purpose of this phase is to engage with the community and inform the process so that the PSGP can accommodate the long term wants and needs of the city. Within the context of Tumwater, the police department is heavily focused on community policing and proactivity. However, the police department wants to understand what that proactive policing looks like for the city of Tumwater so that they can work to meet the needs of residents more effectively. As the field of policing advances, community relations become even more important and increasingly high expectations from residents requires community collaboration.

The community policing approach is aimed at providing more effective and efficient crime control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, and improved police services and police legitimacy, all through proactive engagement. Engaging in an open dialog with the community helps foster positive relations while providing greater accountability of police, greater public share in decision making, and greater concern for civil rights and liberties.

Extant research frameworks created for advancing community policing through community governance have demonstrated four distinct levels of engagement (Diamond & Weiss, 2016):

- Inform- such as providing balanced and objective information to assist in understanding the problems, alternatives, and solutions.
- Consult- such as obtaining feedback on analysis, alternatives, and decisions.
- Involve- such as collaborating directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.
- Partner- such as partnering with the public in each aspect of the decision-making process, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution, in which all participants' input is equally valued.

While strategically planning for the future of the Tumwater Police Department it is therefore imperative to inform the public of the process by which we are building the PSGP, including the evidence-based and research-driven factors that have laid the foundation. This ensures that the community understands that the Tumwater Police Department are approaching staffing in the most appropriate manner and building a deliberate model for the future. The use of the Community Survey and then focus groups ensure that the community is being involved in the process of building the strategic staffing plan and their input becomes an integral part moving forward. This level of community involvement allows for cyclical and ongoing consultation regarding the processes and the decisions. Finally, creating partnerships with the community and including them in the decision-making process demonstrates transparency and inclusion. It also fulfills Sir Robert Peel's 7<sup>th</sup> Principle of Policing a Tumwater Police Department core value:

*Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.*

## HOW

The Tumwater Police Department (TPD) will be conducting a series of focus groups to provide the qualitative data needed to develop the PSGP. Since focus groups are a form of qualitative research, it is important to utilize proper research methodology and protocols to ensure the integrity and validity of the data gathered. The Tumwater Police Department Management Analyst Dr. Oliver Bowers is an established and qualified researcher with extensive experience in advanced research methodologies and human subjects research within social and behavioral research in Washington State.

Focus groups are a type of in-person interview with the purpose of information-gathering in which the researcher guides the group discussions to specific areas of interest. The focus groups typically consist of 8 to 15 people and are created through purposive sampling to bring together participants who can provide a mixture of perspectives (Tartaro, 2021). There will be a total of four focus group sessions on different days and at different times, each with a different group of people, to fully explore the same topics.

Within the research framework, there are three distinct stages: Exploratory research, descriptive research, and evaluation research. The exploratory stage is the first stage in the process and is focused on learning something unknown, which in this case is the community perception of the Tumwater Police Department and this utilized the Community Survey. The descriptive stage, which is the middle stage of the process, aims to provide extensive details of items learned from the previous stage. Within this context this means providing details on the topics covered in the community survey by exploring them

in depth with community members. The evaluation stage, which is the final stage of the process, is aimed at determining the efficacy of the overall process.

This empirically grounded and evidence-based process is built on the concept of the Wheel of Research (Khaldi, 2017) in which quantitative research informs theory and generates hypotheses which can be further explored and reexamined through qualitative research. The deductive process of quantitative methodologies is therefore supplemented by the inductive process of qualitative methodologies. The question guide of the focus groups has been built based on the data gathered through the survey (multimethod approach to focus groups) so that the foundation of these areas of exploration are grounded in existing data. Therefore, the use of focus groups is an evidence-based practice that will inform the strategic plan and allow the police department to build a thorough understanding of the community and how best to serve them and meet their needs moving forward, which is an established practice within community policing research (Connors & Webster, 2001; Diamond & Weiss, 2016; Doane & Cumberland, 2018; Fisher-Stewart, 2016; Kimbrough, 2016; Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter & Bannister, 2008).

Recruitment for the focus groups will use non-probability sampling, specifically purposive and quota sampling, so that the focus groups represent a wide variety of views, perspectives, and demographics (James & James, 2017). This sampling approach will provide a substantial breadth of participants, increasing the external validity of the focus group approach.

To further demonstrate the validity of the focus group, it is important to address the following components: The use of a focus group guide, akin to an interview guide, built on variables drawn from existing research and with a logical foundation, will demonstrate construct validity. Having those measures validated by people other than the principal researcher, such as the command staff, will demonstrate criterion validity. Ensuring that each topic within the focus group guide covers all dimensions of the specific measures being discussed will demonstrate content validity, and those measures being conceptually related to the topics will also demonstrate face validity. Finally, taking findings from previous survey data and exploring them on this level allows for more generalizability across settings, while also helping to avoid ecological fallacy and demonstrating ecological validity.

A limitation of qualitative methods includes reactive effects, such as participants being aware that they are being observed and altering their responses. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher's interactions with the group are minimal and serve only to guide the conversation. Further to this, the arrangement of the focus group's physical setting will be organized in ways that minimize the potential for reactive effects. This includes: the seating arrangement, who can be present, and the room in which the focus groups will take place. The group will be arranged in an almost circle so that none of the participants are in a clear leadership position and are focused on the session and not on other factors in the room. Furthermore, the focus groups will not be recorded so participants feel more comfortable engaging in discussion. This approach requires comprehensive note taking but it has been demonstrated that the recording of focus groups can stifle participant and affect group discussion dynamics.

Focus groups use group interactions to produce data and insights that would otherwise be less accessible. They provide large amounts of rich data within limited time and have been demonstrated to be a very efficient method of qualitative data collection (Dantzker, Hunter, & Quinn, 2016). Focus groups avoid the depth and detail of individual opinions and experiences in favor of data from groups discussing topics of interest. This allows the research to avoid becoming entrenched in the anecdotal and personal experiences of the participants. Within the context of this process, this approach will afford the department an understanding of the policing style they want and expect without becoming bogged down in the details of how to implement it.

The use of a natural, less-structured guide allows for unscheduled probes which work well in focus group settings and allow for deeper explorations and clearer emergence of themes. However, conversations veer and issues such as groupthink and dominant participants can skew focus group discussions so the researcher acts as a guide to redirect conversations but there is also a need for a policy moderator. Within focus groups, the researcher aims to drive participants' responses to Perceptions, Opinions, Beliefs, and Attitudes (POBA) and away from proto-social analytic or putatively factual observations. POBA talk is generated quickly by participants as it does not require consideration or calculation and allows for significant variation among participants (Potter & Robles, 2022).

After all the focus groups are complete, qualitative content analysis is performed. Notes and jottings are compiled, the data is cleaned and organized to generate an information base that can be searched for patterns and themes, which can then be systematically embedded in explanations. The results of the qualitative content analysis will be used to generate recommendations based on a greater understanding of the needs of the community. The police command staff will use the information gathered to inform the Department's service model and to illustrate the policing style the community expects from TPD as part of the PSGP.

## FRAMEWORK & GUIDE

### SETUP

Best practices demonstrate that when conducting a focus group an interview guide should be used with approximately five to seven open-ended questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These questions are based on the Community Survey and are aimed at stimulating group discussion regarding the specific areas of focus.

There will be up to four focus group sessions to maximize the potential for participation and diversity. Each session will last a maximum of 90 minutes, in line with ideal duration to avoid fatigue whilst maintaining engagement throughout. The 90 minute sessions will be divided up into 15 minutes of introduction and explanation, 60 minutes of discussion, and up to 15 minutes for closing discussion and debriefing. A weekday morning session, a weekday evening session, a weekend session will be offered. A final session, scheduled at a time and date convenient for additional participants, may also be included.

Participants will be recruited via several key means, including the city website, department outreach, social media, and community groups. Participants will be invited to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire (age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, profession, household income, education level) as well as a section in which they can explain why they wish to be part of this process. This will allow for a diverse group of Tumwater residents from a wide variety of backgrounds to be selected for the focus groups. For each session a maximum of 15 participants will be selected based on maximum diversity per session, allowing for some potential attrition. Once a participant becomes part of the focus group research they will become part of the overall process and will consistently be kept up to date with the project.

Each session will include the selected participants (with name badges), the principal researcher, a moderator (to help mitigate discussion topics regarding department policy and state law) and a note taker. In order to maintain the integrity of the focus group, minimal observers will be permitted and those allowed in the session must be seated at the rear of the room so as to not distract or influence the participants.

The questions in the interview guide provide a framework for the discussion but may not be asked in a precise order. The goal is to ensure that all topics are addressed within all focus groups, but based on the organic nature of the discussions some topics may be addressed when logically relevant. Each question is based on the results of the Community Survey and relates to key concepts regarding community policing and proactivity within the city of Tumwater.

## THE ANALYSIS

The notes taken by note taker, along with any taken by the researcher (Dr. Bowers) and the moderator, will be consolidated. Dr. Bowers will perform a Thematic Network Analysis. Through this iterative process, the information will be distilled into primary and secondary themes. Primary themes describe the over-arching concepts about public safety and policing expressed by the community. The secondary themes drill down to more specific areas of each primary theme. The analytical process is lengthy and Dr. Bowers anticipates results will be available two to three months after the focus groups conclude.

## USING THE THEMES

Dr. Bowers will present the themes derived from the Thematic Network Analysis to the TPD Command Staff. While designing the PSGP, Command Staff will build the policing service model to meet the needs and wants expressed by the community. Each aspect of the PSGP, from staffing to technology, will be linked back to the primary and secondary themes. This will allow TPD staff and the community to clearly understand the connection between our service moving forward and the resources needed to provide it.