

Redlands Police Department “Peace Officer” Decals

Examining whether new patrol car decals labeled “Peace Officer” will change community perspectives about law enforcement

Agency: Redlands (CA) Police Department

Trial Duration: 09/22/17–02/01/18

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Context

Law enforcement agencies may evoke a sense of law and order, but these groups may also be viewed as “them” rather than “us.” This sense of separation can interfere with efforts to make communities safe by implying an adversarial relationship. Efforts to improve the relationship between the community and law enforcement may benefit from a change in perspective.

Key Finding

Community members and police volunteers endorse the use of “Peace Officer” decals, although officers are less supportive of these efforts to change the community perception of police.

*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy “Pracademics” who lead trials.

Background

Efforts to counter possible negative connotations associated with “police” include changing the perspectives of both the community and police officers themselves, such as changing the perception of law enforcement from “warriors” to “guardians.” A subtle change in how officers are viewed might include transitioning from “police officer” to “peace officer.”

Evaluation Design

The Redlands Police Department tested the effectiveness of “Peace Officer” decals installed on half the department vehicles for improving views of law enforcement among the community. The evaluation surveyed a convenience sample of local citizens at community events, community volunteers, and officers over an approximate six-month period.

Results

Survey results (see table) indicate more support for the “Peace Officer” decals and perception of officers as “peace officers” in the community and among volunteers than among police officers. For example, 56% of the surveyed community members and 59% of volunteers believe that the decals will improve or significantly improve perceptions of the police department, compared to only 15% of the officers. Support for the use of

the decals also demonstrates a difference between officers and community/volunteers. Only 18% of officers support use of the decals, compared to 73% of the community and 68% of volunteers. These results suggest that making small changes could improve the community’s perception of the police department and foster improvements in police-community relations. Survey results may also demonstrate to officers that making small changes may lead to better community support, which ultimately may lead to safer and stronger communities.

Survey Item	Officers (n=74)	Community (n=106)	Volunteers (n=22)
<i>How will decals change public perception of PD?</i>			
Worsen/Sig worsen	3%	7%	5%
No change	82%	37%	32%
Improve/Sig improve	15%	56%	59%
<i>Support for decals</i>			
Support	18%	73%	68%
Don't care	51%	13%	32%
Don't support	31%	14%	0%
<i>Would consider introducing myself as "Peace Officer"</i>			
Yes/Maybe	34%		
Probably not/Never	65%		
<i>Would decals change community's perception of "Peace Officer" label?</i>			
Worsen		4%	
No change		32%	
Improve/Sig improve		63%	
<i>Would decals affect volunteers' perception of their service?</i>			
Worsen			9%
No change			59%
Improve/Sig improve			32%

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