

3-1-2008

Opportunities for Engaging Minorities

Dallas D. Owens Dr.

Follow this and additional works at: https://press.armywarcollege.edu/articles_editorials

Recommended Citation

Owens, Dallas D. Dr., "Opportunities for Engaging Minorities" (2008). *Articles & Editorials*. 111.
https://press.armywarcollege.edu/articles_editorials/111

This Colloquium Brief is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles & Editorials by an authorized administrator of USAWC Press.



Colloquium Brief

Strategic Studies Institute

U.S. Army War College and
North Carolina Central University



OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGING MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN SECURING OUR NATION

Dr. Dallas D. Owens
Strategic Studies Institute

KEY INSIGHTS:

- Successful engagement of minority communities by community, state, and national security agencies requires cultural understanding and appreciation for diversity within and among the agencies and willingness by agency leaders to initiate contact, either directly or through mutually-trusted agents.
- Understanding generational differences within minority communities is important for successful engagement, especially for long-established communities that continue to receive new members from foreign locations.
- Security agencies must have the ability to communicate effectively with minority communities to establish mutual trust and successfully engage their members.
- Disadvantaged and at-risk communities, with or without minority populations, are especially vulnerable to disasters and require particular attention when planning for mitigation, response, and recovery.
- There is a long and honorable tradition of service by minorities in securing their nation; that service must continue to be recognized, as the basis for continued participation and leadership by minority members.

The Department of Criminal Justice, North Carolina Central University, in cooperation with the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, conducted a colloquium titled “Opportunities For Engaging Minority Communities in Securing Our Nation” on February 11, 2008. The conference, held at The Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, attracted over 75 participants and attendees, who addressed methods for successful engagement by security and public health agencies with Latino, Muslim, and at-risk communities. Participants included community, state, and regional leaders from the communities of interest, law enforcement agencies, health service providers, homeland security agencies, and educational institutions.

The program examined five aspects of minority community engagement in national security issues: two concerned engagement in specific minority communities (Muslim and Latino), one a “field” of engagement (public health), one a traditional type of engagement (military service), and one a prerequisite

Visit our website for other free publication downloads

<http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/>

[To rate this publication click here.](#)

for successful community engagement (effective leadership). The five aspects included (1) dynamics of engaging the growing Latino community, with emphasis on police department best practices to include Latino concerns and participation in community security; (2) participation of the Muslim community in planning for and response to natural disasters and terrorism threats; (3) providing public health services to all at-risk communities, which are often minority or those with significant minority populations; (4) the relationship between the military and its minority officers; and (5) aspects of service and leadership in minority communities. Three panels and two featured sessions were organized to meet the five program objectives; presentations by each panelist and speaker were necessarily related to the other four.

Engaging the Latino Community.

Four law enforcement leaders from three North Carolina cities discussed issues with engaging their growing Latino communities, with emphasis on police department best practices. The cities ranged from small (Salisbury) to large (Charlotte); three of the four panelists were Latino. All agreed that a high percentage of non-documented Latinos reside in their cities, but contend that their mission is to serve all residents and their status should not affect the quality of that service. They equally contend that without adequate communication and trust, service will not be possible. Their Latino communities are vulnerable to crime, yet distrustful of police because of experiences in their native countries, isolation from the greater community, and, for some, fear of prosecution for their illegal status.

Each of the three departments have developed programs to engage the Latino community and have achieved some success; their size, initiative, consciousness of the issue, and relatively high level of resources probably position them for success more than the State's many smaller jurisdictions. Even so, they admit to difficulty in recruiting and retaining officers with language skills and cultural training. All recognize the value of using trusted individuals and institutions as a means to gain initial access to community leaders and, eventually, the larger community membership.

Gangs exist, but do not constitute a problem deserving extraordinary measures; it is preferable to respond to individuals breaking the law, not to organizations.

Engaging the Muslim Community.

Four Imams, representing two North Carolina Muslim communities, assessed their constituents' relationship to security organizations. They recommended methods to successfully engage their constituents to enhance participation in planning for and responding to natural disasters and terrorism threats. The Imams emphasized trust and successful communications, as well as the need for understanding cultural diversity within Muslim communities. One community's diversity is obvious in its description—its members speak 20-30 languages and are one-third African American, one-third South Asian, and one-third Middle-eastern and North African. Of the two-thirds that trace their recent links to foreign locations, there are generational divides and varying experiences, many very negative, with foreign security organizations.

None of the Imams have seen a desire for violent jihad among their community members and contend that no authority for such inclinations exists. Some of their young are exposed to unhealthy violent views, and there is concern that a few may be misled. The Imams see their communities as victims of the violence, not its perpetrators, and their experience with security organizations has been mostly positive; other religious groups have been very supportive. Community members have not participated much in security organizations, the first generation members because of negative experiences in their countries of origin and the next generation because they are motivated to seek higher paying and more prestigious jobs.

The Imams recommended five actions to improve engagement with their community members: (1) educate the general population and security agencies about the Muslim community, (2) educate the community about rights and responsibilities to the country, (3) make the community aware of the importance of safety and security, (4) ensure laws are strict but fair and

protect all residents equally, and (5) plan for and ensure that responses to attack will be reasoned, balanced, and legally applied to all groups.

Engaging Minority Communities in Public Health.

Public health professionals assume that all vulnerable populations are likely to need additional support to prepare for and recover from disasters. Vulnerable populations can be found in all communities, but those that are less healthy, less prosperous, and more isolated from services contain higher percentages of the vulnerable. That is often the case in minority communities or those with significant minority populations. Vulnerable individuals include those that (1) have communications constraints; (2) are receiving institutional care (medical, justice, nursing, etc.); (3) are in deferential statuses (dependents); (4) have medical conditions requiring periodic care, medications, and treatments; or (5) have social difficulties with or distrust authorities and service providers.

The public health vision is to remove health care disparities from vulnerable populations, in both normal times and those of disaster. The two concerns that must be addressed to achieve this vision are poor lifestyles and emerging infections. If public health providers are to successfully prepare for disasters, they must meet challenges that include (1) engaging and sustaining community-based efforts, (2) testing disaster plans, (3) having time to devise and implement plans, (4) being given adequate resources, and (5) being considered a high priority by local, state, and federal governments.

Resources have increased in recent years, some from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in response to the anthrax scare and concern over influenza outbreaks, especially the threat of a pandemic. Vaccine programs have been instituted, surveillance teams established, public health and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) deployable links established, and both special and all-hazard threat plans developed.

North Carolina's Public Health System report card for disaster preparation is good, meeting nine of ten national planning and programmatic

requirements. However, many of the state's citizens remain pessimistic about their safety, especially African-Americans, Hispanics, and women. Much work remains to overcome citizens' lack of confidence. Providers must include communities more in the planning process to better communicate plans and accomplishments and thereby gain their trust.

Minorities in the Military.

The Buffalo Soldier Greater North Carolina Chapter, in period uniform and equipment, provided historical narratives to illustrate contributions to the Nation's security by African-American soldiers. The presentations emphasized the bravery and quality of service of these soldiers, even during times when they were not treated with equality and respect by the Army or their Nation.

The luncheon speaker, an Air Force colonel and author, discussed the modern relationship between the military and its minority officers. The contrast with the Buffalo Soldier era illustrates the huge strides made in minority participation, especially in achievements in leadership positions. The speaker noted the underrepresentation of minorities at the General Officer level, but stated it is more productive to emphasize the preparation of aspirant lower- and mid-grade officers rather than dwell on reasons for the current discrepancy. He voiced confidence that the conditions within the military are encouraging for minorities' full and successful participation.

Developing Minority Community Service and Leadership.

Each of the three panels examined aspects of service and leadership in minority communities. The Director of North Carolina's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service described the State's participation in a National program, Citizen Corps. This Department of Homeland Security initiative for volunteerism has five programs: (1) Volunteers for Police Service, (2) Neighborhood Watch, (3) The Community Emergency Response Team, (4) Medical Reserve Corps, and (5) the Fire Corps. These programs are

selected and supported by the 92 Citizen Corps Councils established across the State, and they serve 74 percent of the State's population. The councils are comprised of community leaders, to include key individuals such as the Chief of Police, Superintendent of Schools, Fire Chief, and others who can ensure that adopted programs (any or all of the five) will have community support. These leaders must recognize the need for and ensure minority participation.

Teams created in the community can be based in a variety of locations, college campuses, high schools, businesses, or other community groups. The State organization conducts "train-the-trainer" classes, using a FEMA curriculum. Although successful to date, the goal is to continue expanding until 100 percent of the State's population is served.

Conclusion: The Way Ahead.

This colloquium demonstrated that minority communities can be positively engaged in securing our Nation. Many of the barriers to engagement (poor communications, distrust, lack of understanding) are known, many of the security organizational changes and resource requirements are clear, and the need for minority community leadership and motivation is understood. The panels provided case studies that show how motivated, informed, and cooperating leaders can do much to reach common security goals. But panelists and speakers represented only a small sample of the many agencies, communities, and organizations that are involved in the process—and they were selected because they have achieved a degree of success. We can be encouraged by their presentations, but should not assume that they necessarily represent attitudes and behaviors found in many communities in North Carolina or beyond its borders. Even these "success stories" indicate that much remains to be done to initiate minority participation, and, once initiated, it cannot be allowed to lapse through neglect. The resources required by organizations and communities to ensure successful engagements to secure their communities are never enough and always in demand from other worthy programs. Communities where policies are

implemented must continue to recognize the value of engagement for security and press for these policies to remain a priority. Policymakers must recognize the necessity of minority community participation in the process to secure the Nation, empower security agencies to engage these communities, and allocate sufficient resources to make them successful.

The views expressed in this brief are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This colloquium brief is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

More information on the Strategic Studies Institute's programs may be found on the Institute's homepage at www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil.