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Oak Park Police to ask citizens to rate their encounters

Citizens who have encounters with Oak Park Police officers soon will be able to rate how they felt the interactions went as part of a University of Illinois Chicago study.

Beginning June 1, Oak Park Police will be offering many of the individuals with whom they come into contact an opportunity to participate in a survey as part of a long-term research project designed to collect data that could help improve police procedures and approaches in not only Oak Park, but also the state and nation.

The study is part of a long-term effort known as the [National Police Research Platform](#) administered through UIC's [Center for Research in Law and Justice](#). The goal, officials say, is to systematically collect data that will help establish benchmarks for what represents excellence in policing.

Oak Park and River Forest are the first communities in the region to agree to participate so far. Two police districts in Boston also will be part of the initial survey project. However, researchers say they believe others will get involved as they learn more about using such information to help them better understand how objective, empirical data can help them fine tune their recruitment and training programs.

"We are very excited to have the opportunity to participate in this project," said Oak Park Police Chief Rick C. Tanksley. "Knowing how the public perceives their experiences with our officers is invaluable to having a better understanding of what we do well and what we need to improve."

Participating in the survey will be simple. As police reports are filed, a letter will be sent to each individual asking them to take a survey either by telephone or online. The letters will include a special code needed to participate the survey and ensure that only one survey is completed for each encounter.

Tanksley stressed that no one asked to participate in the survey should fear that the information could be used in other ways. None of the survey information will be collected by the Oak Park Police Department since all survey responses will be managed by the UIC researchers. In fact, the Oak Park Police Department will not even know if any of their officers' encounters resulted in a survey response, he said.

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Police encounters that involve traffic accidents and stops, as well as most non-violent crimes, will be part of survey. However, encounters that result from violent crimes as well as those involving juveniles will not be surveyed.

"This effort is not about individual officers or specific respondents," Tanksley said. "It is about gaining a broader understanding of what is happening on the streets so we can create training programs and approaches that will help us improve the services we provide the community."

For more information on Oak Park's role in the survey project, call 708.356.3800 or e-mail police@oak-park.us.

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