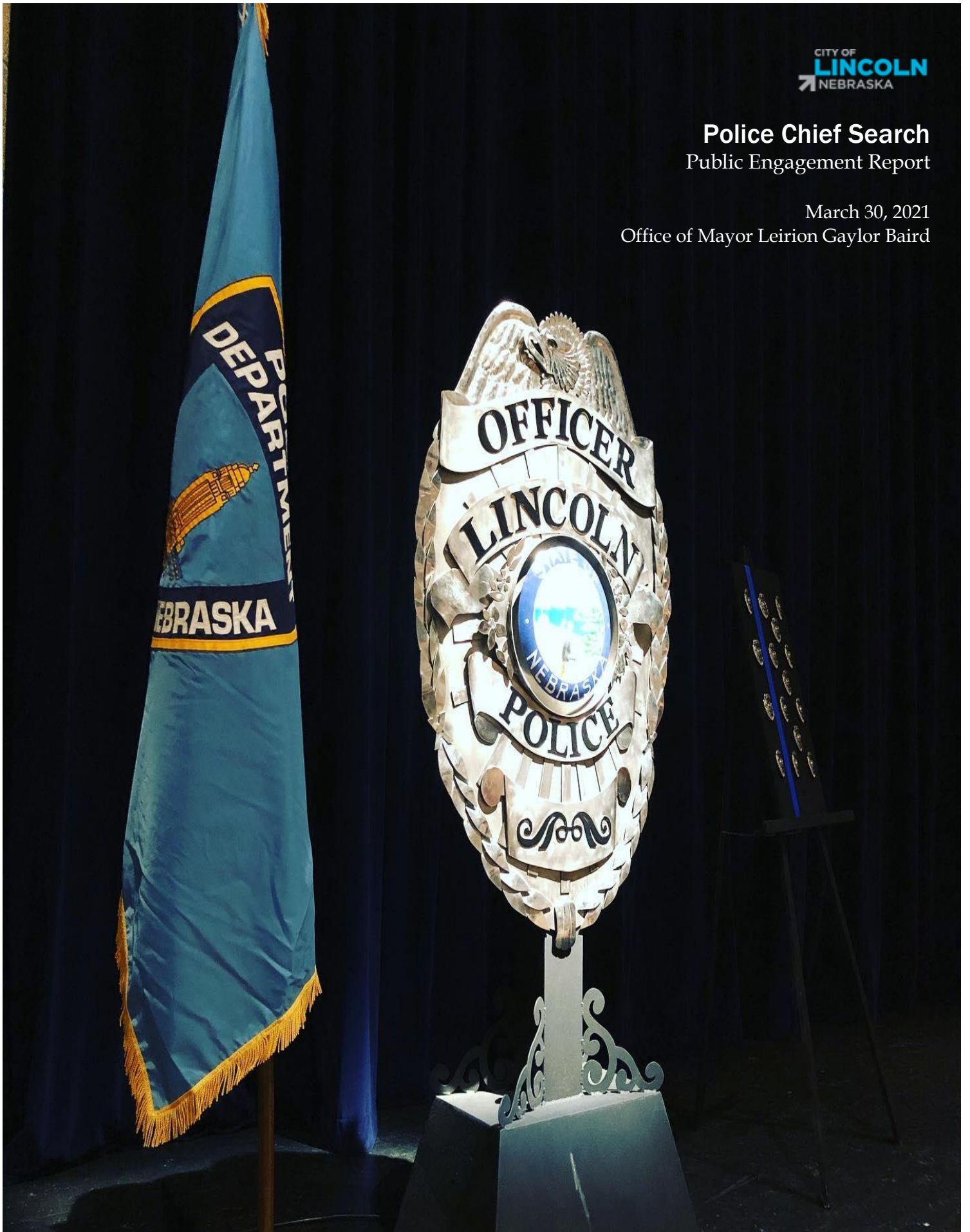


Police Chief Search

Public Engagement Report

March 30, 2021
Office of Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird



Introduction

Background

On January 8, 2021, Lincoln Police Chief Jeff Bliemeister accepted a position in the private sector. On February 18, 2021, Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird launched a four-week public engagement process to seek community feedback on the skills and qualities residents would like to see in Lincoln's next Police Chief.

Public Engagement Methods

The public engagement process included a short survey in which residents could participate. The survey was available online in five languages and at local library branches in paper format, with the option to be taken via phone. In addition, the Mayor invited the community to participate in focus groups. She met with a diverse cross-section of residents and community stakeholders. She held a total of six public focus groups with representatives of the business sector, education sector, faith communities, law enforcement organizations (e.g. Lancaster County Sheriff's Department), social service partner organizations, neighborhoods, and youth. She also engaged in 13 meetings with different groups of Lincoln Police Department staff, three City Advisory Board meetings (Mayor's Multi-cultural Advisory Committee, Mayor's Neighborhood Roundtable, and Citizens Police Advisory Board), and three scheduled group meetings (System-Impacted Youth, NAACP, and Black Lives Matter) for a total of 25 events.

Partners and Process

The City is working with the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), a police research and policy organization that has helped cities recruit and select well-qualified Police Chief candidates for 30 years, to conduct a national search. PERF has assisted with more than 75 executive searches in the last ten years and is experienced in coordinating successful searches during the pandemic.

The position announcement will be developed based on feedback compiled in this report and released it at the end of March. Throughout the month of April, PERF will help the City screen applicants, and an interview panel will meet with selected candidates in late May. Once the interview panel recommends the finalists, the City will schedule an additional public forum in June to provide an additional opportunity for public input before a final decision is made by the Mayor. The nomination is then subject to approval of the City Council.

Results

Data Structure

Most of the survey results were easily quantifiable as residents were asked to choose from a prepopulated list of responses to a standard set of questions. The first part of this report describes the results of the data gathered quantitatively. The second part of the report describes the qualitative data we received from the open-ended response sections as well as from our focus groups and listening session notes.

Through every channel (phone call, focus group, or online survey) residents were asked to weigh in on the same set of topics.

- **Qualities** they would like to see in the next Police Chief.
- **Priorities** the next Police Chief should address in the coming years.
- **Interview Questions** they would like applicants to answer.

The data provided in this report will be linked to these broad categories for the most part, though some feedback we received on open-ended responses and in discussions during focus groups will also be included.

There were 1,591 responses to the online survey, 18 paper survey submissions, and four phone calls over the course of the month in addition to the data gathered from the 25 previously mentioned virtual focus groups and listening sessions.

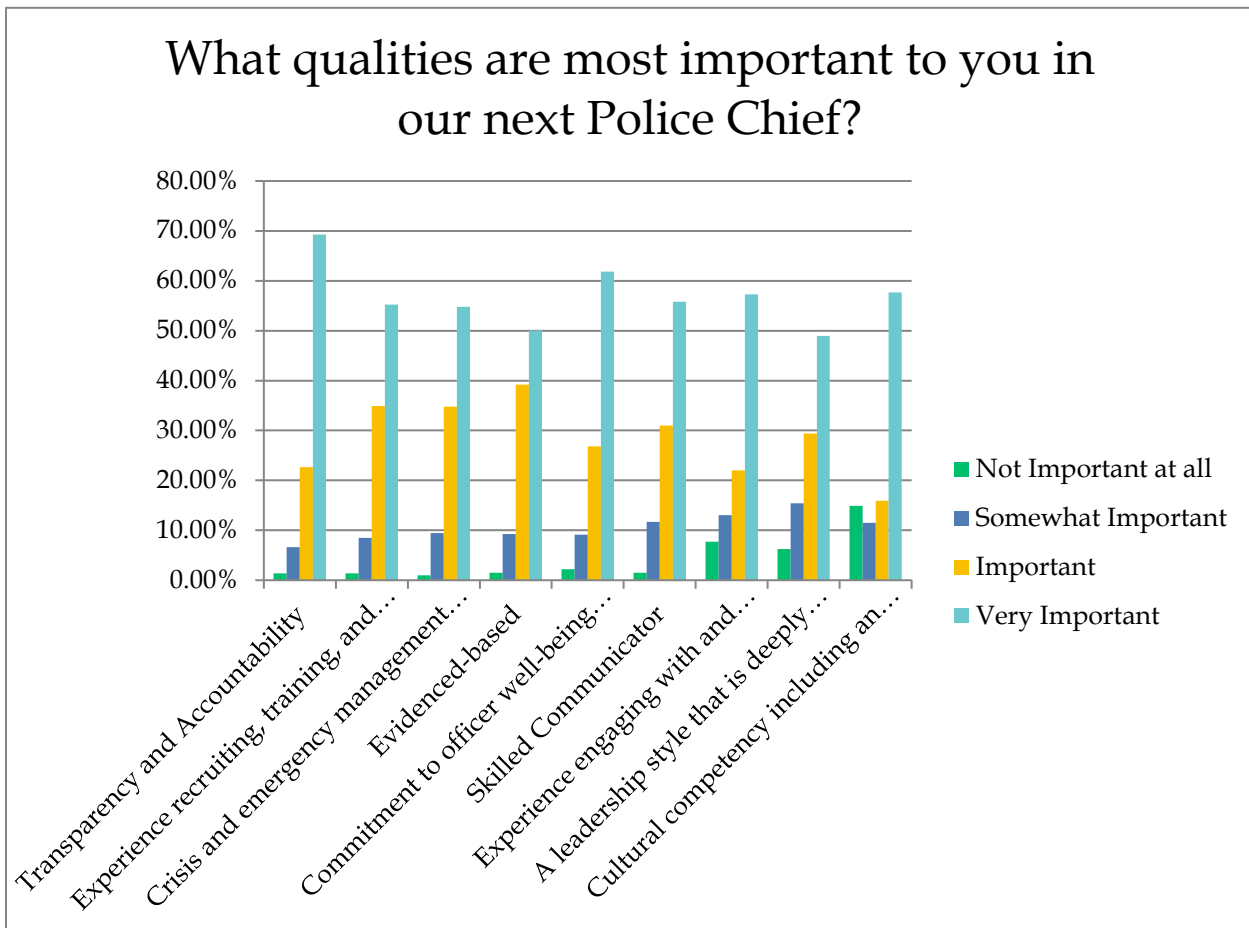
Qualities

“What qualities are most important to you in our next Police Chief?”

Respondents were asked to answer this question by ranking a set of answers on a scale of ‘Not important at all,’ ‘Somewhat important,’ ‘Important,’ and ‘Very important.’

Sorted by those with the most respondents listing a quality as either **Important** or **Very important**, this list and the corresponding chart show that, while some qualities resonated with a wider audience, all of the qualities put forward were marked as Important or Very Important by the vast majority of respondents (the lowest percentage was 74%).

Quality	Percent marked as Important or Very important
An unwavering commitment to transparency and accountability	92%
Experience recruiting, training, and retaining quality personnel	90%
Crisis and emergency management experience	90%
Proven ability to develop and implement evidence-based strategies to improve public safety	89%
A demonstrated commitment to officer well-being and safety	89%
A skilled communicator, both internally and externally, who creates transparency through their ability to create clarity across various mediums including the press, in-person, in group settings, and on social media	87%
Experience engaging with and incorporating feedback from diverse communities	79%
A leadership style that is deeply rooted in community policing	78%
Cultural competency including an understanding of structural racism	74%



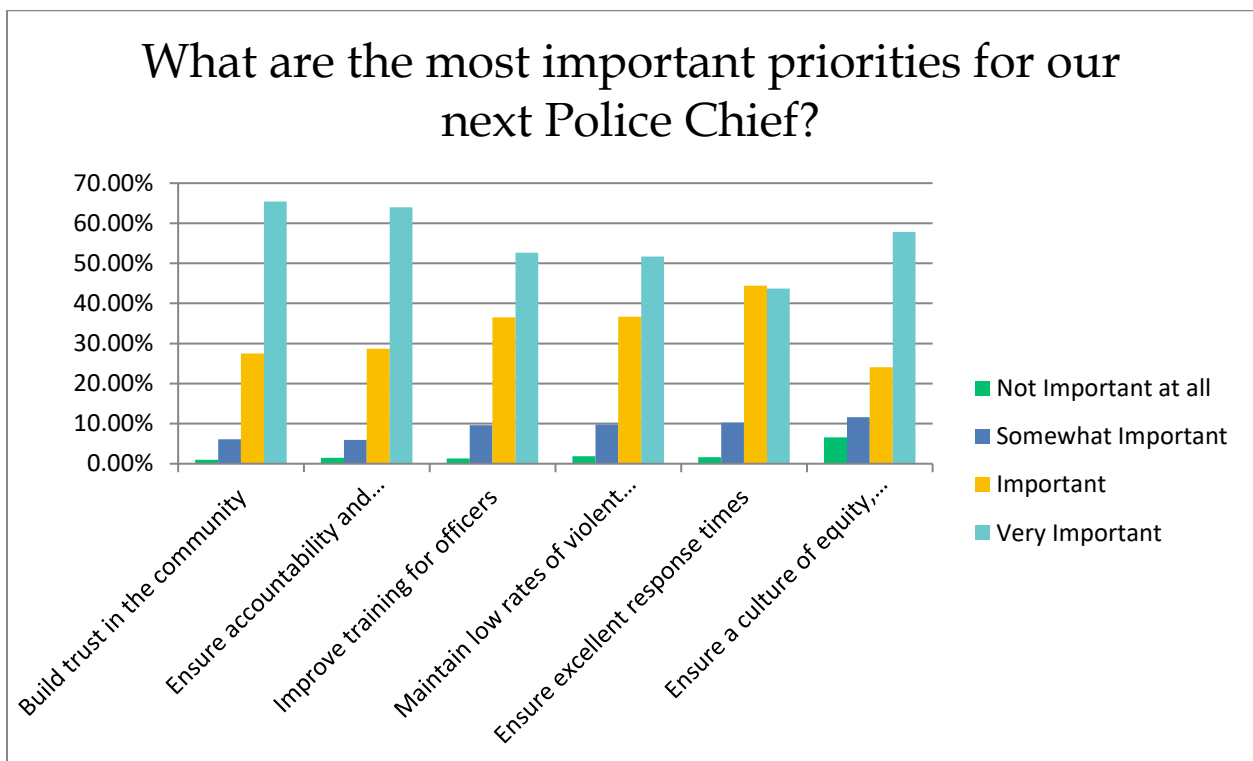
Priorities

“What are the most important priorities for our next Police Chief?”

Respondents were asked to answer this question by ranking a set of answers on a scale of ‘Not important at all,’ ‘Somewhat important,’ ‘Important,’ and ‘Very important.’

Similar to the results of the Qualities question, all of the priorities listed received high marks. This data is also sorted by those with the most respondents listing a priority as either **Important** or **Very important**.

Priority	Percent marked as Important or Very important
Build trust in the community	93%
Ensure accountability and transparency within the department	93%
Improve training for officers	89%
Maintain low rates of violent crime	88%
Ensure excellent response times	88%
Ensure a culture of equity, inclusion, and respect within the department	82%



Qualitative Data Summary

While priorities and qualities are distinct areas, many respondents used the ‘other’ option to voice more open-ended thoughts. As such, the responses for the priorities and qualities fell into similar categories. To standardize the feedback, the same overarching categories were used to analyze responses to both questions. While comments from the focus groups and listening sessions were included as part of this analysis and in the categories highlighted, these responses were not included in the counts for each category, as the discussion and back-and-forth nature of those conversations were not as clearly quantifiable.

There were 472 qualitative responses to the Qualities question on the survey. 114 fell into multiple categories. There were 265 qualitative responses to the Priorities question on the survey.

Data from both the survey and the community focus groups were categorized using the following codes:

1	Personal characteristics
2	Experience with diverse populations and prioritization of diversity & equity
3	Prioritizes accountability, transparency, and reducing the use of force
4	Leadership & Management Skills
5	Works with the community and prioritizes community policing
6	Understanding the needs of people with mental illness and/or substance use issues
7	Experience
8	Will resist influence of the current Mayor or espouses views opposed to hers
9	Upholds the law
10	Preferred demographics
11	Local or outside candidate
12	Committed to reducing the role of police in the community
13	Other

Summaries of responses and representative quotations from each of the categories:

Part 1: Personal characteristics

101 survey responses focused on personality characteristics they would like the new Chief to display. The most commonly listed characteristics include honesty, integrity, empathy, and humility. Additionally, many respondents listed that it is important for the new Chief to possess a strong willingness to listen to diverse perspectives and be

able to learn from mistakes. Another clear theme was a preference for a Chief that remains fully apolitical and is able to use common sense.

Representative comments:

"1. Collaborative leadership style 2. Empathy, ability to walk in others life experiences 3. Flexible openness to change 4. Open to listening to offers needs and concerns."

"No politics! Keep everyone safe no matter what your views are."

"Professional, sincere respect for self and others."

Part 2: Experience with diverse populations and prioritization of diversity & equity

129 survey responses mentioned the importance of diversity and equity. Many of these responses focused on the importance of the Police Chief having experience working with diverse populations including racial and ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities and mental illnesses, immigrants, and youth. Other responses in this category talked about the importance of having a Police Chief with a deep understanding of systemic racism and a commitment to combating racism and sexism within the police force, including hiring more women and minority officers.

Representative comments:

"De-escalation, strongly anti-racist, supports BLM, advocacy for mental health, understanding of systemic oppression and mental health and how it impacts community members."

"We need a far more diverse police department. We need to dismantle systemic racism in policing, imprisoning, and create a more diverse police force."

Part 3: Prioritizes police accountability, transparency, and reducing the use of force

120 survey responses talked about wanting the new Police Chief to institute policing reforms. Many respondents mentioned preferring a Police Chief that advocates for de-escalation training and decreased use of force by officers. Additionally, responses talked about the importance of holding officers accountable for protocol violations and encouraging officers to report instances of misconduct.

Representative comments:

"Demonstrated commitment to officer accountability. Demonstrated efforts to reduce the use of force."

“Focus on providing training for officers to deescalate situations in a nonviolent manner.”

Part 4: Leadership & Management Skills

110 survey responses talked about the Police Chief needing high level leadership and staff management skills. Many comments were focused on the need for the Police Chief to prioritize officer safety and to be an advocate for officers. Additionally, respondents mentioned a need to pursue increased training for officers to ensure that current best practices are followed. A main theme across responses was the need for the new Chief to have the leadership skills necessary to build trust both within the force as well as with the broader community.

Representative comments:

“A leadership style deeply rooted in serving as an advocate for police officers and in helping the community better understand the value that these officers bring to the community through their efforts.”

“Someone who puts safety of his/her officers and safety of the community ahead of any political agenda.”

Part 5: Works with the community and prioritizes community policing

66 survey responses talked about the importance of the Police Chief working collaboratively with community members and organizations. Responses focused on the importance of a community policing model where officers attend community events and listen to the needs of the community. Additionally, survey and focus group respondents emphasized the importance of the Chief maintaining and building relationships with other organizations such as Lincoln Fire & Rescue, Lincoln Public Schools, other law enforcement agencies, faith communities, businesses, and universities.

Representative comments:

“A dedication to the community and remembering that the Police are supposed to serve communities.”

“Willingness to work with community agencies and organizations to improve the public’s relationship and trust with police. Humility. An understanding and priority placed on educating officers on better community relations with people of color.”

Part 6: Understanding the needs of people with mental illness and/or substance use issues

55 survey responses mentioned that it is important for the Police Chief to have an understanding of residents with mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Respondents mentioned a preference for a Police Chief with knowledge of best practices for interacting with people with mental illnesses. Many also stated that they would like the new Chief to work with community organizations specializing in mental health treatment when responding to calls that may involve interacting with people with mental illnesses.

Representative comments:

“Ability to recognize that people struggling with addiction need help and rehab and not just thrown in jail.”

“Understanding & implementing mental health response strategies including utilizing mental health clinicians, peer support, and community agencies who provide services to individuals experiencing mental health symptoms.”

Part 7: Experience

39 responses listed specific types of experience that they hope the Chief to have. Respondents mentioned a need for the Police Chief to have a demonstrated history of reducing crime and dealing with periods of community unrest. Other responses mentioned preferring a chief with experience dealing with gang activity, drug crime, domestic violence, and sexual assault.

Representative comments:

“Ability to deal in a comprehensive way with all the elements surrounding individual and community emergencies and unrest.”

“Ability to accept criticism and work with critics to improve performance. I would say that the person needs police background, but that background must be impeccable. I would want someone who can teach and lead by example.”

Part 8: Will resist influence of the current Mayor or espouses views opposed to hers

37 survey responses talked about how the Police Chief should resist any influence from the current Mayor in doing their duties or would like the new chief to be diametrically opposed to the Mayor politically. The comments in this section expressed negative views of the Mayor or her assumed ideology.

Representative comments:

“Ability to stand up to a left-wing mayor and BLM.”

“Following the rule of law and not special interests or mayoral wishes”

Part 9: Upholds the law

33 survey responses mentioned the importance of enforcing the law equally without regard to race or gender. Many of these respondents also mentioned the importance of upholding the Constitution, particularly the 2nd amendment.

Representative comments:

“A firm belief in Constitutional restrictions of government.”

“Enforces the laws as written fairly, honestly and impartially.”

Part 10: Preferred demographics

55 responses listed specific demographic traits they would prefer the new Police Chief to have. 18 respondents expressed a preference for a Chief that is a person of color while 3 preferred a Chief that is white. 15 respondents expressed a preference for a Chief that is a woman while 2 expressed a preference for a man. 14 responses stated that the demographic background should be irrelevant and that the Chief should be chosen solely on their qualifications for the position.

Representative comments:

“A multicultural police chief is a benefit to everyone.”

“You need to ignore name, race, religion, sex, etc and pick a good quality candidate who knows what they are doing. You will have more problems if you only pick a candidate on trying to be politically correct.”

Part 11: Local or outside candidate

27 survey responses expressed a preference for whether the candidate should have experience working within the Lincoln community. 19 respondents preferred a candidate that has worked for LPD or a local agency, citing the importance of understanding the Lincoln community and the culture of LPD. 8 stated a preference for a non-local candidate to bring a fresh perspective to the department.

Representative comments:

“Local experience. Someone familiar with Lincoln and its environment.”

“I want you to look seriously outside of the Lincoln Lancaster County area. LPD may not want someone from the outside but it’s time for a new infusion of thought in this department.”

Part 12: Committed to reducing the role of police in the community

34 survey responses stated a preference for a Police Chief willing to reduce or eliminate the role of police within the community. Almost all of these comments mentioned a preference for redirecting some emergency calls and LPD funding toward other professionals, such as social workers, to address situations involving mental illness or children.

Representative comments:

“Pilot program for non-police (social workers) to go out on calls involving developed disabled, calls involving children, they should go out on domestic violence calls and only use police if necessary.”

“A commitment to limit the role of police to truly protect public safety for all and nothing else.”

Part 13: Other

49 survey responses did not fit into any of the above categories. The types of comments in this section included specific recommendations for hire as well as people they would prefer not to be the new Chief. A few were abusive or targeting specific people with personal attacks. Most other comments were about the survey itself rather than answering a specific question.

Interview Questions

“If you could ask one question in the interview process, what would you ask?”

This was an open-ended question in our survey and was also discussed at length in our various focus groups and listening sessions.

In the online survey, there were 1,221 responses to this question. In addition, feedback was combined ideas from focus groups and listening session notes. Below is a word cloud that represents the most commonly used terms from the feedback received.



Interview questions were wide-ranging as respondents suggested questions that would help define potential candidates, their values, and their character.

Many proposed questions fell into similar categories as those defined for Qualities and Priorities, and in similar ratios. Many more questions fell outside measurable categories and sought not to discern whether the candidates shared the respondents' values but were more general attempts to gain insight into the candidate's thoughtfulness and ability to self-examine.

Rather than categorize and tabulate the results, the data below represents a sample of some of the most consistently asked questions as well as those that stood out as unique.

Interview Question Examples

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt uneasy around someone with a different background? How did you deal with that situation?

In a time of crisis how would you address the community understanding and the diversity of thought within the community?

How would you deal with officer retention?

What metrics are important to you?

Have you had training in mediation?

What are your goals to work toward community policing?

What is your plan for adequately training SROs in childhood and adolescent trauma and cognitive development?

What have you done to work with other agencies in a team? What is your relationship with neighboring agencies?

What other organizations do you see as vital partners in the community?

How do you intend to recruit the next generation of law enforcement?

How do you see policing changing in the future? What are the new paradigms to consider?

How do you envision showing support to your team while also listening to groups that feel marginalized or disrespected/unequal treatment? How do you listen to criticism while supporting your team?

Would you be able to team with non-uniformed LPD staff to handle mental health, substance abuse, and other similar calls?

Will you act in an apolitical manner?

Why do you think people commit crimes?

If an officer breaks the public trust are you willing to hold them accountable to the same extent you would a private citizen?

How will you take care of your own officers?