
**THE MINNEAPOLIS CRA QUALITY SERVICE AUDIT:
A TWO-YEAR REPORT, 1998 - 2000**

A Report to the Civilian Review Authority

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Minneapolis CRA continues to receive very favorable ratings from the people it serves, including both citizen complainants and Minneapolis police officers. Over 87 percent of both citizens who filed complaints and officers subject to complaints between 1998 and 2000 report that they "had a chance to tell their side of the story." At the same time, 81 percent of complainants and 87 percent of police officers feel they were treated with respect by the CRA.

These ratings are particularly high when compared with evaluations of other citizen oversight agencies. An evaluation of the New York City Citizen Complaint Review Board (CCRB), for example, found that both citizens and police officers were extremely critical of the complaint process.¹

The fact that both citizens and police officers give the CRA high ratings indicate that the CRA is perceived as being fair and not biased toward one side or the other.

THE QSA PROCESS

The Quality Service Audit process is a model program for systematically soliciting customer feedback on the citizen complaint process. The QSA surveys can identify problems in the delivery of services and suggest needed corrective action. The Minneapolis CRA was the first citizen complaint agency to establish such a program. Other agencies are currently considering developing similar programs.²

Customer satisfaction with the complaint process is an extremely important issue. Complaint procedures, whether operated by police internal affairs units or external citizen complaint agencies, have several different goals.³ One is to conduct fair and thorough investigations of complaints. Another is to provide a satisfactory experience for both complainants and police officers. Regardless of the ultimate outcome of a complaint, people on both sides of a complaint investigation should feel that they were treated fairly and with respect and that the investigation was thorough and fair. In short, the perception of fair treatment is extremely important.

THE DATA

This report includes an analysis of returned surveys for the first two years of the QSA system (fall 1998 - fall 2000). The surveys include 203 from citizens --36 citizens who filed sworn complaints that were investigated and 167 from citizen who contacted the CRA but did not file a complaint (referred to here as "pre-complainants")-- and 121 surveys from police officers.

As noted in a report on the survey's from the first year, low response rates from citizens continue to be a problem. The response rate from citizen complainants is about 15 percent, and about 12 percent from citizen pre-complainants. The response rate from police officers, however, is about 50 percent. The different rates for citizens and police officers are understandable. The QSA process is completely voluntary and citizens have no clear incentive for answering the survey. The majority of citizens are busy, probably feel that they are not likely to file a complaint in the future, and consequently probably feel they have little to gain from completing the survey.

Police officers, on the other hand, as employees of the city, and as persons who may face another complaint in the future, have a continuing interest in the CRA and the complaint process.

The data are analyzed in the following manner.

Returned citizen forms are divided among "complainants," individuals who filed a signed complaint that was investigated by the CRA, and "pre-complainants," individuals who contacted the CRA about a problem but who ultimately did not file a signed complaint.

Returned police officer forms are analyzed first in terms of all officers. A separate analysis is done for those officers whose complaint involved a formal hearing before the CRA Board. This sub-group involves only those complaints where the CRA staff found probable cause. For those complaints where the staff did not find probable cause, the officer would not have any contact with the Board.

Caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the results in several categories because of the small number of responses. The total number of citizen complainants is only 36. Moreover, this includes only 13 women, twelve African Americans, 3 Hispanics, and 1 Asian American. The police officer surveys include only 8 female officers, 6 African Americans, 8 Asian Americans, 2 Hispanics, and 2 Native Americans. Only 13 officers who had a hearing before the CRA Board and only 18 who accepted mediation returned surveys. The small numbers in these and other categories do not permit sophisticated statistical analysis. The returned surveys do, however, provide useful data on general patterns of experiences with the CRA.

FINDINGS

A. CITIZENS

1. Citizen Complainants

Citizen complainants give the CRA extremely high ratings. For the two year period, 87 percent say they had a chance to tell their side of the story and 83 percent say they were treated with respect. There are only slight variations between the first and second year responses.

Citizens whose complaint resulted in a hearing before the CRA board were substantially less satisfied with the process. This group includes only ten citizens for the entire two-year period. Only 20 percent (2 out of 10) indicated that they were satisfied with the hearing process. The low rate of satisfaction for this stage of the CRA process is probably due to the fact that a CRA hearing is an extremely formal process, closely resembling a trial, and the fact that the CRA Board sustains only about half of those complaints that go to a hearing.⁴

Citizens were also somewhat less happy with the outcome of the CRA process than they were with the process itself. Only 37 percent of respondents answering this question felt that the outcome was fair. Only 16 percent of the complainants felt that the CRA process was helpful, while 60 percent were critical of the CRA investigation. Another 16 percent were critical of the police or the law.

2. Citizen Pre-Complainants

Citizens who contacted the CRA but did not file a complaint ("precomplainants")

represent a much larger group than those who filed a complaint (167 vs. 36 returned surveys). Citizens in this group are generally satisfied with their experience with the CRA, although at a slightly lower rate than for complainants. For the two year period, 72 percent feel they had a chance to tell their side of the story and 73 percent feel that they were treated with respect. There were no significant differences between the first year and the second year responses to these two questions.

The QSA form includes a separate question for pre-complaints regarding information or assistance they received from the CRA. For the two-year period, slightly more than half (51.9 percent) say they received some "useful assistance" from the CRA. Twenty-one percent report that they were referred to another agency by the CRA staff. About 14 percent indicate that the CRA staff "explained police procedure" to them. Many pre-complainants (42 percent) received more than one type of assistance from the CRA.

About half (49 percent) of the pre-complaints indicate that the outcome of their contact with the CRA was fair. As is the case with complainants, precomplainants are far more satisfied with the process –how they were treated by the CRA– than with the outcome.

B. POLICE OFFICERS

A total of 121 Minneapolis police officers returned completed QSA forms for the two year period. Generally, officers express extremely favorable attitudes toward the CRA. An overwhelming majority (91 percent) feel they had a chance to tell their side of the story and 91 percent reported that they were treated with respect by the CRA investigator. All police officers

have contact with the CRA staff. Only those against whom the CRA staff finds probable cause have contact with the CRA Board in the form of a hearing. A total of 13 officers who went to a hearing returned completed QSA forms. Seventy-seven percent (10 out of 13) of the officers who had a hearing were satisfied with the hearing process.

Ninety-one percent of the officers feel that the outcome of their contact with the CRA was fair. This is substantially higher than is the case with citizens and is probably explained by the fact that the CRA does not sustain most complaints.

C. VARIATIONS BY RACE, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER

1. Race and Ethnicity

The reported levels of satisfaction with the CRA vary in an inconsistent pattern by race and ethnicity. On some questions whites give the CRA higher ratings than African Americans, while on other questions African Americans give higher ratings. The number of Asian American, Hispanic, and Native American surveys is extremely small.

The reported levels of satisfaction among citizen complainants vary by race. On the question of whether they feel they had a chance to tell their side of the story, 89 percent of whites indicate they did, compared with 75 percent of African American complainants. African American complainants, however are more likely to feel they were treated with respect than whites (82 percent vs. 78 percent). African American complainants are far more likely to feel that the outcome of their contact with the CRA was fair than whites (55 percent vs 20 percent).

Among citizens precomplainants, the results are more consistent. Generally, whites are more satisfied than African Americans. Eighty-one percent of white pre-complainants feel that they had a chance to tell their side of the story, compared with 62 percent of African Americans. Fifty-eight percent of whites feel that the outcome of their experience with the CRA was fair, compared with 48 percent of African Americans.

Because of the extremely low number of racial and ethnic minority officers who returned surveys, no meaningful statistical analysis is possible

2. Gender

The responses of males and females citizens who have contact with the CRA vary in an inconsistent pattern. Among complainants, 92 percent of the women feel they had a chance to tell their side of the story, compared with 86 percent of male complainants. All of the women complainants (12 out of 12) felt they were treated with respect, compared with 77 percent of the male complainants. Finally 45 percent of the women complainants felt the outcome was fair, compared with 33 percent of male complainants.

Among pre-complainants, on the other hand, males are slightly more satisfied than females. Seventy-seven percent of male pre-complainants feel they had a chance to tell their side of the story, compared with 65 percent of females. Seventy-six percent of male precomplainants feel they were treated with respect, compared with 71 percent of males. Finally 53 percent of male precomplainants feel the outcome of the case was fair, compared with 49 percent of females.

Among police officers, all of the females reported positive experiences. One hundred

percent of the female officers feel that they had a chance to tell their side of the story, that they were treated with respect, and that the outcome of the case was fair. Among male officers, the responses were 90 percent favorable on all three questions.

CONCLUSIONS

The QSA surveys suggest that the Civilian Review Authority is doing a very good job in providing high quality service to the citizens and police officers of the City of Minneapolis.

The first and most important indicator is the QSA program itself. The CRA is the first citizen oversight agency to undertake a systematic feedback survey of its customers. The survey has the potential for identifying problems in service delivery that need to be corrected. The CRA has achieved deserved national recognition for this effort.

Second, on the two basic questions regarding how they feel they were treated by the CRA, both citizens and police officers give the CRA very high ratings. These responses are in sharp contrast to the high levels of dissatisfaction that have been found in surveys of other citizen oversight agencies.

Third, the fact that the CRA receives high ratings from both citizens and police officers indicates that it is consistently treating both sides in a fair manner. This is an extremely important achievement in a field where, across the country, there is much distrust of complaint investigation procedures by citizens, or police officers, or both.

Fourth, the fact that citizens are substantially less satisfied with the outcome of their contact with the CRA is understandable. By its very nature, the CRA is contacted by citizens who

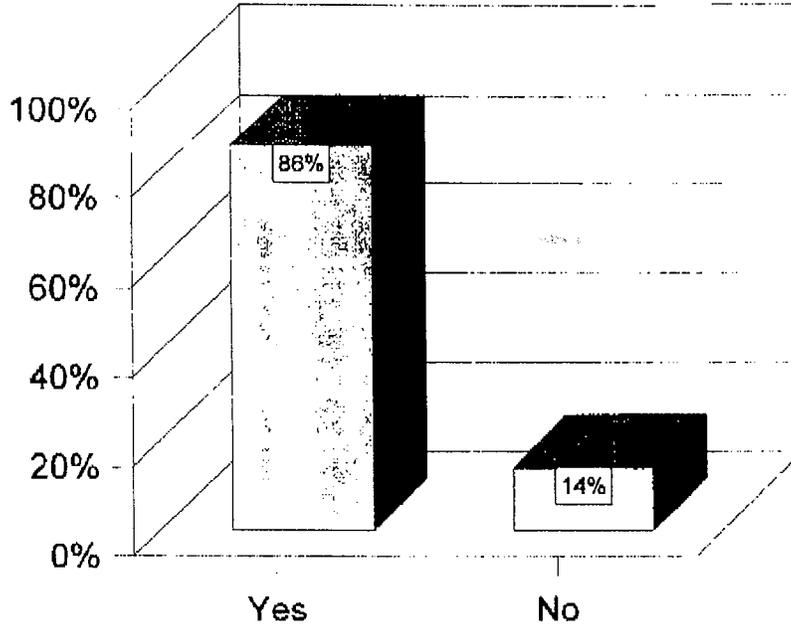
are angry about some aspect of their treatment by the police. Many citizens mistakenly assume that the CRA will automatically vindicate them, and do not understand the inherent difficulties in sustaining a complaint against a police officer (mainly obtaining credible objective evidence). Thus, the lower ratings on this question reflect unrealistic expectations. The high ratings on the questions related to how citizens feel they were treated offset the responses to this question and indicate that the CRA is listening to its customers and treating them with respect.

Fifth, the low response rates to the survey from citizens continues to be a matter of concern. The CRA Board should consider adding procedures that would encourage more citizens to complete and return QSA surveys.

In conclusion, the CRA is to be commended for having developed the QSA system and for the generally positive ratings it receives from both citizens and police officers.

1. Sviridoff and McElroy, Processing Complaints Against Police: CHECK: The Complainant's Perspective (New York: Vera Institute, 19__).
2. Samuel Walker, Police Accountability: The Role of Citizen Oversight (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001).
3. Douglas Perez, Common Sense About Police Review (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), pp. _____. Walker, Police Accountability, pp. _____.
4. These findings parallel those in New York City where levels of satisfaction declined as citizens went further into the process. Sviridoff and McElroy, Processing Complaints ADD ADD

CHANCE TO TELL YOUR SIDE OF THE STORY?
Citizen Complainants



CHANCE TO TELL YOU SIDE OF THE STORY?

Police Officers

