

Youth Engagements Window IV

**Elevating Young People's
Voice for how to
"Reimagine Policing in
Boulder" Report**
July - December 2022



**Mayamotion Healing
Growing Up Boulder**
April 2023



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Background

Between April 2021 through May 2022, Growing Up Boulder (GUB) and Mayamotion Healing (MMH) worked with the City of Boulder and 458 children and youth on Windows I, II, and III of the “Reimagine Policing” or “Boulder Police Department Master Plan.” This report is a summary of the approach and findings from the first half of the final engagement window, Window IV, of the Reimagine Policing project.

In July 2022, City Council reviewed the “[Reimagine Policing \(Police Department Master Plan\) Update](#),” which built upon previous community engagement. A draft version of the Master Plan plan described six community safety values statements, six community focus areas for policing, and thirteen major strategies. The city’s original timeline included a window for community engagement on the draft during the summer 2022, a revised draft plan in October and another opportunity for community input soon thereafter. The final plan was then to be presented to City Council in December 2022.

The timeline, however, was delayed due to council’s request for more community input and a request for the city to better describe the vision and potential measurements for success. This was also a request that came from the youth engagements. Thus, while this report covers GUB and MMH’s engagement with young people from June-December 2022, at the time of this report, Window IV is not yet complete.

Timeline

- August-October 2022: Engagements with community-based youth groups
- November 2022: Youth/City of Boulder PD Town Hall
- December 2022: GUB/MMH's draft report submitted to City of Boulder
- April 2023: City of Boulder, Boulder Police Department, GUB/MMH, and YOAB staff meet to discuss report; City and BPD offer edits
- April 2023: YOAB offers edits
- April 2023: Final revisions are written

Initial Youth Engagements

After reviewing the 84-page memo to council from July 28, 2022, which describes the PDMP Draft, the GUB-MMH team wrestled with how to present a complex set of ideas during a very short engagement period to a variety of youth groups. Our team re-organized the Draft Plan by listing focus areas first, then listing the strategies under each focus area. We also met with the National Policing Institute (NPI) consultant to seek alignment between our questions and approach with young people and her focus groups with adults. In spite of our significant work to make the information in Window IV youth-friendly, the **young people we worked with grew frustrated** by the subject-specific terminology and by the lack of specificity in the strategies. We were not able to get feedback on the actual strategies from our first groups of young people because the **material felt inaccessible** to them.

Our first youth engagements in Window IV included:

- 1. ELLOS (boys from El Centro Amistad)**
- 2. TGTHR (formerly unhoused youth)**
- 3. GENERATIONS (youth from Boulder County Public Health)**

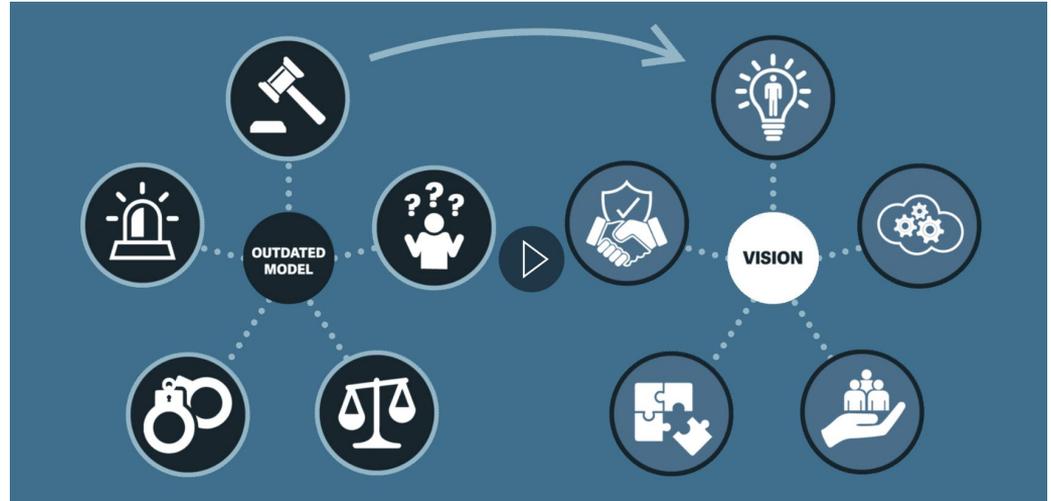
Groups we reached out to, but that were too busy to engage during Window IV:

- 1. BVSD's Youth Equity Council (YEC)**
- 2. Centennial Middle School students**

Subsequent Youth Engagements

Based on the frustration expressed by our youth, we returned to our city partners to ask for **accessible, clear and concise language, streamlined concepts, and graphic representation of the concepts**. In response to our request [and perhaps requests from others as well], the city created a [summary presentation](#) for the public, complete with images, simplified language, and selected examples of strategies and focus areas. This helped us tell the story more effectively when working with the next group of youth, which was composed of teens from the City's Youth Opportunities Advisory Board (YOAB), the community, and BVSD's Youth Equity Council (YEC). This group included 14 teens.

This image from the city illustrates the transition from an outdated policing model to their new vision. GUB-MMH utilized this within the youth engagements.



Summary of Youth Feedback about the Process and Plan

Many youth were engaged throughout Windows 1-3; Window 4, however, posed unique challenges to youth engagement for a variety of reasons.

What we heard from youth:

- The current, 84-page draft offered for review was too overwhelming to unpack.
- Students liked the slides showcasing the Vision - though some expressed skepticism in the action steps behind the words.
- The proposed strategies still felt too vague.
- Students wanted more concrete and specific strategies that were less vague and more powerful; ie. really “reimagining” and making big change and the proposal did not feel like that to the young people
- Re-organize the information so it’s by focus areas with strategies underneath (vs. the other way around) [in response, GUB/MMH did this].
- Students wanted more visuals to showcase the plan and strategies - making information more accessible to the reader [in response, the city did this].

Additional steps taken:

- Reviewed the [New Era](#) report on policing as an example compared to [City Draft](#)
- Planned an end-of-the-year Circulo Group between young people and police. While the hope was to draw a diverse set of teenagers with varying lived experiences with police, the group was less representative of populations with negative policing experiences. Some youth opted out of attending for reasons that varied from being overwhelmed, busy, or feeling unsafe or intimidated to share their experiences and feedback.

Círculo Focus Group Approach

Throughout our engagements, but especially during Window IV, we sought to prioritize **relationship building** in order to cultivate **authentic** direct feedback on the current draft plan of reimagining police in our **community**.

To do so, Mayamotion Healing facilitated a series of **Círculo** sessions (see next slide) with each of the youth groups. In addition, MMH facilitated a meeting with city adults [Chief Maris Herold and City of Boulder staff], and finally, a *Círculo Focus Group session* with youth, the Chief, local police officers, and City of Boulder staff together.



Explaining the Círculo Practice

Círculo y Palabra



Círculo practice is a communication approach rooted in cultural and healing modalities and teachings among Indigenous communities. This approach uses a racially equitable framework and centers the strengths in relationship and person-first approaches that promote positive team dynamics. Characteristics include:

- Creating a space for youth and adults to share collectively
- Centering equity; endeavoring to avoid power dynamics or any one voice taking up too much space during discussions
- Finding connection, inspiration, and truth telling through each other's stories and experiences
- Inviting youth and adults to be open and vulnerable with each other, even amidst differing viewpoints

Through this facilitated framework, Mayamotion Healing aimed to stay attuned to the mental health and social emotional needs of the group. MMH provided strategies and techniques for emotional regulation and engagement while also developing resilience and building leadership strategies interpersonally, professionally, and collectively.

What we did in the combined Focus Group:

- Opening, welcome, agreements
- Large group activity– all involved shared about themselves through an object that said something about their identity
- Preparing for brave conversations - Somatic exercise/sharing what each person was most worried about in the room and how to remain engaged in the process
- Mapping out goals
- Small group dialogue–police-youth dialogues on vision statement
- Large group share out
- Next steps and recommendations
- Closing



Glitter and Change:

Feedback from Youth about Policing and the Draft Plan shared before and during the Youth-Police Focus Group

Glitter

(what's going well and/or is appreciated about the draft plan and policing in Boulder)

- Police are fast and responsive in crises
- Police department's willingness to reform
- Transparency as a value
- Both youth and the Chief agreed that there should be resources to call prior to reaching the need to call police for interventions

Change

(wishes for improvement or change about the draft plan and policing in Boulder)

- Uniforms are intimidating (as a note, officers and the chief came in plain clothes to the forum)
- Improved or different response to mental health issues
- Wish to be unafraid of police when walking to the supermarket
- Wish for the police and the community to see each other as people
- Police are scary - "you have a PR problem"
- Wish for the "police not to be out to get us," only to keep us safe

Glitter and Change:

YOAB After-Session Feedback about the Focus Group Experience

Glitter	Change	Youth want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Police department was really receptive to having these conversations ● Some police-student small group interactions felt “calm” 	<p>Feedback for MMH/GUB facilitators: Too much emphasis on preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not enough time to talk with police department personnel–youth stated this numerous times ● Repetitive–would have preferred less time explaining the process or revisiting themes talked about in prep meeting <p>Feedback for police participants: The teacher-student dynamic in some small group interactions felt patronizing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conversation was led too much by the police ● Youth felt they were being talked at ● Police responses felt defensive and like they were putting youth in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ongoing sessions and more face time with police personnel ● More time on issues (and less context setting) ● Equal voice time between adults and youth (use active listening techniques) ● A conversation (“not a civic lesson”) ● To experience police being open to their feedback ● To walk away from all discussions with the sense that their voices matter

Glitter and Change: YOAB Quotes about the Youth-Police Focus Group Experience



“It was an invaluable experience, and I’m so lucky to be a part of it. It was great to get to know the police Chief and other kids, and see the ideas and thoughts they had about the current policing situation. I also think it was it was insightful to hear about Chief Maris Herold’s vision and her goal for the future. I’m looking forward to meeting with everyone again!” – *Quote from a teen participant*

“We’re only interested in continuing dialogue if they [the Police] are invested in it as well. We want and need them to understand that it comes with both good and bad. If we were to have more conversations it should be reciprocal with both parties having an active role.” – *Quote from YOAB participant*

“It felt more like a student-teacher dynamic...they kept talking at us.” – *Quote from a teen describing small group discussions between officers and teens*

Suggested Next Steps after Youth-Police Focus Group

City's suggested next steps to YOAB/teens:

- Continue to share your thoughts about how policing should look in the future
- Speak at City Council meetings regarding the Police Department Master Plan
- Spend time with officers, either watching police trainings, visiting the police department in general, or participating in ride alongs (if age-appropriate)
- Serve as a liaison between the Police Department and young people [beyond YOAB] who wish to engage with the department

Young people [who participated in the focus group]'s suggested next steps:

- Have police come to where young people are (literally and figuratively) to continue dialogue
- Ask police to understand that Reimagine Policing conversations come with both the good and the bad (easy and hard topics of conversation)
- Create reciprocal conversations with both parties having an active role
- Offer more the opportunity for small group interactions with the PD
- Be invited to and participate in a Police Department Training

Growing Up Boulder and Mayamotion Healing's suggested next steps:

- If the police department and young people wish to set up a system for continued dialogue, problem solving, and relationship building, we see great potential in that. Discussions would be needed about how to conduct the dialogue itself, as well as about all parties' values, hopes, and fears about the state of policing in Boulder.
- Invest in youth development trainings in order to support brave conversations and meet youth where they are emotionally.

Growing Up Boulder & Mayamotion Healing Conclusions

Window IV has been the most challenging window for youth engagement. Youth most marginalized by society (those with lower incomes, varied immigration status, and/or who have been unhoused) were most frustrated with the draft plan, finding it opaque and hard-to-understand. They were also more hesitant to meet directly with police, and in fact, many chose not to. Youth from more dominant populations (financially better-off, already connected with government, non-immigrants, and/or those who are housed) expressed greater connection with the Police Master Plan draft and more interest in meetings directly with the police. This difference in desire to meet face-to-face with police is directly tied to positionality; that is, the social and political context that creates a person's identity and how their identity influences and biases perception of, and outlook on, the world.

Based on the input from all groups of young people, MMH and GUB recommend more direct and concise language in the plan and communications around the plan. (At the time of this report being released, the city has provided a 10-page summary to assist in future engagement.) In addition, we believe the most successful way to continue developing a shared vision and partnership between the police and young people will be to have ongoing dialogues between both groups, with a protocol that honors their feedback, especially young people from groups that have historically had negative interactions with police (for example, those who have been unhoused, are immigrants, have disabilities, have experience with the criminal justice system, are LGBTQ, and/or are people of color). Despite varying points of view within policing topics, youth are eager to delve into issues with the police and hope to include more of their peers in the future.

The Police Master Planning process has been an opportunity to begin exploring these issues, and the key to future success will come from a relationship-first, honest approach and a continued commitment towards real change; as Boulder's Reimagine Policing website states, **“Words and dialogue are not enough. It is time for change through action.”**

Resources



Growing Up Boulder:

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www.growingupboulder.org



Mayamotion Healing:

info@mayamotionhealing.com

<https://mayamotionhealing.com/>

Boulder Police Master Plan and Reimagining Policing:

[Growing Up Boulder/MAYAMOTION Healing Report](#)

[City of Boulder - Reimagine Policing Webpage](#)

*Thank
you!*